



Long Live Southbank
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All Councillors, Lord Mayor of Norwich, MP Norwich North, MP Norwich South
Norwich City Council
City Hall, St. Peter's Street
Norwich NR2 1NH

Ref: NCC01

7th November 2014

Dear all,

Norwich has a vibrant and healthy skateboarding scene spanning many years. It is greatly disappointing to hear that Norwich City Council is considering a ban of this important artistic and cultural expression under section 235 of the Local Government Act 1972, in a bid to prohibit skateboarding in the City Centre.

Our understanding is that though the ban stems from concerns over aspects of the war memorial, the by-law would cover an extensive part of the city centre including the memorial gardens, Hay Hill, Gaol Hill, The Forum, Castle Meadow, London Street, Exchange Street, St Andrews Street and the gardens at Norwich Castle.

Long Live Southbank feels there is a much more inclusive way of dealing with the matter rather than criminalising Norwich's young people and visitors to the city. We are writing to express our strong support for the skateboarders of the city in their campaign against a proposed further extensive and heavy-handed crackdown on street skateboarding.

It is our experience that custodians of public spaces, and spaces used regularly by people, can severely misjudge public mood, views and opinion. We also experienced the avoidable financial and social cost that results from the failure to provide adequate public consultation. The solution is to work together with communities.

Our understanding is that there has been very little public consultation on the intended ban and very little engagement with the local skateboarding community. This results in a decision that affects the public but which has no input or direction from the public and, as representatives of the electorate, there is a responsibility for

the council to ensure decisions are based on quantifiable data covering a broad a spectrum of sources and origins. A petition opposing the ban already features over 2,800 signatures.

We are advised by local skateboarders that the claims made by council members, and given to the press, have been untrue and have resulted in the vilification of young people who enjoy skateboarding. It was also noted that the online consultation was far from being properly democratic and limited public debate and censored people who support a relaxing of the ban from democratically voicing their opinion. Such methodology is in tune with the outdated nature of the ban itself.

We as a community and representatives of the community, should be working together on how we share our cities and make them accessible to all, and not on creating further barriers that makes them exclusive and inaccessible. Norwich has an opportunity to show it is continuing on its path to being a modern, progressive, people-friendly and welcoming city, and lead on its ability to understand inclusivity and culture, and create an example to others on how cities work with diverse communities and their needs.

Skateboarding supports more than just the physical act, it supports other creative practices such as filmmakers, photographers, visual designers and provides opportunities for other transferable skills and values. It promotes physical and social well-being and a much-needed alternative to gadgetry as it encourages young people to get outdoors, get physical, and explore their cities and local areas. Add to that that skateboarding is one of the fastest-growing physical activities in the world, particularly with girls and young women, and there is enough reason to suggest local authorities encourage these physical expressions as opposed to discourage and, as in this instance, criminalise them.

The Long Live Southbank campaign showed just how out of touch decision makers can be and how public mood can be misjudged. An unprecedented 150,000 people signed in support of keeping the Southbank skate spot. Our campaign table helped us engage directly with tens of thousands of people of all ages, all backgrounds and life experiences and from all over the world. Our public consultation provided an opportunity to translate the love, passion and creativity all skateboarders feel for their art into words that those in governance and establishment positions can understand.

Skateboarding was born in the streets and therefore is best suited to this context. When you are skating a purpose built skatepark, you are shunted out of the way of society and left only amongst fellow park users. This is uninspiring and limiting. Many councils who commission skateparks do not consider that skaters of advanced ability will share a space with families taking young children with scooters, this results in the times they can practice being severely restricted. The physical structures in skateparks only have limited ways of being skated, many of the obstacles will be very similar to those in other towns. There is little unique about most skateparks and, by fencing young people off, you lose many of the positive benefits that young people could gain from participating in an outdoors artform. Not everything has to be reduced to design and control and in addition, many skateparks, such as Eaton Park,

are built outside of city centres making them inaccessible to many that cannot afford the time or cost to travel to them. This further alienates people and send a strong message of marginalisation.

Conversely, when you are skating in the street, you are able to interact with your surroundings in a far freer and more natural way. You learn about your city, move through it. Through skateboarding you open your eyes to all of the architecture and the possible ways of skating it. It is a fantastic, mind-broadening way to look at a city.

Sadly there is still an element of those in decision-making positions who will unjustifiably vilify skateboarding and discriminate against skateboarders. At Southbank we have fostered a highly positive relationship between the public and skaters. People gain from watching people skate and the way skaters reinterpret architecture. Street skateboarding can and should be used as a way of uniting people in an area, rather than dividing them and encouraging and breeding an attitude of resentment.

We do recognise that there are areas where skateboarding is inappropriate, such as Memorial Gardens and the War Memorial itself, we believe that the bulk of the skate scene is already in agreement about this, and local skaters are making efforts to educate those who don't understand the implications of skating in these spots. It would be wholly unfair to generalise and project the acts of individuals on to an entire community, and to punish the majority of skaters who wish to explore and get to know their city in an exciting and forward looking way, due to the actions of a minority.

We strongly advise you to enter into a conversation with the local skateboarding community about how to move forward positively. Running consultations which dismiss a huge bulk of opinion as invalid will not help move towards a positive solution, or do anything to help the disillusionment with the political system that many young (and older) people feel. If the discussion is to be positive, both sides must go into it open-mindedly. If you took the time to enter discussions with the local skateboarders, you would find highly open minded and progressive thinking. We urge you to review your plans and enter into a positive dialogue with them.

If Norwich is to be at the forefront of progressive and inclusive cities and be part of how communities evolve in the way they engage and interact, and not be regressive and exclusive, then it must not waste this opportunity. All too often we hear about the marginalisation of young people and the messaging that young people are somehow disinterested and disengaged and lethargic and inactive. Long Live Southbank showed that this image couldn't be further from the truth. The Norwich skate scene are showing that they are equally as passionate about their city, their surroundings, their culture, and their expression. We encourage Norwich City Council to recognise and support this and be part of the solution, and not the problem.

Yours sincerely,

Long Live Southbank