

PRESS RELEASE – 24<sup>th</sup> November 2014 for immediate release

## **Norwich City Council set to vote on skateboarding ban in face of mounting opposition**

On Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2014 Norwich City Council are set to vote on a proposal to ban skateboarding and other social activities from its city centre under section 235 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Local skateboarders set up a petition to oppose the ban which gained over 5,000 signatures in just over 2 weeks, overshadowing the highest number of signatures on the Norwich City Council website for any previous petition; 73 gathered over a 2 month period.

Councillors who support the ban to ban skateboarding have been stating that skateboarders are dangerous and accused them of damaging the cities war memorial. Norwich skateboarders have been singled out by the councillors as the problem and would be criminalised under the proposal by portfolio holder, Keith Driver.

Leader of the Council, Brenda Arthur stated in June that she had 'seen people on the corner of City Hall actually been nearly knocked over by skateboarders'. Despite the claims, the council have yet to provide the skateboarders with a single document of evidence on either the alleged danger or damage. The council has yet to comment on people climbing the war memorial during the switching on of the Norwich City Centre Christmas lights.

Sam Avery, a local skateboarder and owner of Norwich skate shop, Drug Store, said; *'The council have been saying they engaged with skateboarders and held public consultations but we have called them out on this as being untrue. Instead they have been using opportunities to create a bad image of skaters, while not being able to provide any evidence for the things they have been saying. We've asked them for documents and so far not received a single one, or even so much a reply from Councillor Keith Driver – the person responsible for the proposed ban'*.

The council has been accused by campaigners and Norwich's Green Party councillors of having a flawed public consultation process, and being out of touch with public views. While the creators of the ban have cited support from war veteran organisations, recent conversations between skateboarders and war veterans reveal a very different story as they find common ground. This was further revealed in a panel discussion held by local Norwich broadcaster, Mustard TV, aired earlier this month, which featured skaters and Chair of the Norfolk and Norwich Combined Ex-servicemen's Association, Brian Wilson. The councillors responsible for the ban declined the invitation to take part in the debate stating they were 'unavailable'.

Results from a Norwich City Council poll, which ran for only six weeks, asked local residents whether they supported an extension to the ban. The results were 6% in favour, 92% against and 2% said they didn't know.

Norwich City Visions says it wants 'to identify less mainstream ways of getting young people fired up about democracy by putting the topic across in a way they find appealing and which motivates them to get involved'.

Paul Richards, who wrote a letter to Norwich City Council on behalf of skateboarding campaign group, Long Live Southbank, said;  
*'The irony is that Norwich City Council is attempting to entice young people into politics via their Norwich City Visions initiative aimed at 'getting young people interested in democracy', while at the same time showing a complete lack of connectivity with young people and actively ousting them out of the City. Equally as ironic is that the Labour councillors, who hold a majority in the cabinet, could completely ignore public opinion and push the ban through using their majority position, making a mockery of democratic processes, and the voice of the people they are elected to represent.'*

Councillor Mike Sands called the 5 page letter sent by skaters to all councillors 'tosh' in his reply to the Leader of the Council. He later apologised after the Long Live Southbank published his email saying he was saddened he had 'muddied the waters on a subject where there are already strong feelings'.

Sheriff of Norwich, William Armstrong, said in his speech at the annual meeting of Norwich City Council in June this year that Norwich 'is a city of rich diversity' and that;  
*'I want to encourage pride in the city of Norwich. Norwich has a splendid and inspiring heritage. Norwich also has a tradition of radicalism and innovation. It has always been prepared to "do different". As one of my predecessors, Nick Williams has written, Norwich has always done different and often before anyone else.'*

Norwich was unsuccessful in its bid for the title of City of Culture 2013 and has since been pushing itself as the shopping destination of the East, seemingly missing the increasing trend of public support of culture over commerce, as seen with the Long Live Southbank campaign run by skaters which gathered 150,000 members, and obtained over 40,000 objections to their skate spot being turned into eateries and retail units. The City Council launched Healthy Norwich in 2013 the same year but seem to be missing the cultural and health benefits skateboarding bring to young people and the city.

Chewy Cannon, born and raised in Norfolk, and a professional skateboarder of 8 years, said:  
*"Community cities and towns are built on embracing new and expressive art forms and it would be a shame to deny such a growing sport and art such as skateboarding. Having the space for myself when I was young gave me the opportunity to fulfil a dream that would have seemed impossible without free public space to use and be free within. Skateboarding is not a crime, so maybe the city council need to rethink and let people remain creative within their city."*

Skateboarders and war veteran organisations met this weekend, along with Green Party councillors, to discuss recommendations and solutions that did not involve them being banned. Norwich skaters plan to deliver their petition and proposals to the full council meeting, and have asked to present their case to councillors in an attempt to stop skateboarding becoming a criminal offence in Norwich City Centre.

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Long Live Southbank  
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Notes to editors;

Drug Store is Norwich's skateboarding shop <http://drugstoreskateboarding.com/>

Long Live Southbank (LLSB) is the campaign that prevented London's skate spot on the South Bank from being destroyed as part of a now-cancelled redevelopment scheme. Letters from LLSB and the skateboarding scene her: <http://www.llsb.com/llsb-open-letter-to-norwich-city-councils-proposed-skate-ban/>

Petition of over 6,400 names opposing ban <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/stop-the-norwich-skateboard-ban>

The petition will be skated to Norwich City Hall for 6pm Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> November as part of a protest from 6pm-7pm ahead of the council meeting at 7.30pm.