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Risk control
Skateparks
A Guide for Local Authorities



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Skateparks

A Guide for Local Authorities

Introduction

This guidance has been produced to provide a broad overview for the many considerations that a Local Authority needs to address when looking at the feasibility of developing local Skateparks.

As part of considerations, importance should be attached to compliance with 'BS EN 14974:2019 - Skateparks - safety requirements and test methods'¹.

This document applies to skateparks for public use intended for the use of skateboards, other roller sports equipment and BMX bikes.

It specifies safety requirements and requirements for testing and marking, information supplied by the manufacturer, and information for users. It also addresses inspection and maintenance regimes to protect users and third parties (e.g. spectators) from hazards, as far as possible, when using a skatepark as intended, or as can be reasonably expected.

This standard does not apply to bike facilities modelled from ground, gravel or rock.

Skateboarding has been a recreational activity within the UK for many years. Yet in some areas it remains confined to almost derelict or unused areas. This is seen by some as leading to conflict with certain communities and yet others who have embraced the culture by providing dedicated areas suggest that it has many positive influences. An Australian website focusing on local government issues suggests "engaged kids are less likely to take part in antisocial behaviour that can result in damage to other local government infrastructure".² Skateboarding also offers multiple physical and mental benefits including stress relief, social interaction, cardiovascular health maintenance and improved co-ordination³.

With skateboarding showcased for the first time at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, and included in the Olympic Games Paris 2024, there is an even greater onus on local authorities to consider providing dedicated facilities locally as the sport may be increasing in popularity due to the inclusion in these events.

As the Independent recognises in its piece on skateboarding, 'skateboarding defies the neoliberal logic of the city by making it a playground for all. Skateboarding has transcended to new levels and is now 'no longer just for punkish, subcultural rebels – it's everywhere, for everyone'⁴.

For any local authority planning on developing skateparks or receiving planning approvals for a development it is essential that there are two principle and important areas to focus on:

— Usability; and

— Functionality

Examples of usability would include such aspects as:

— Speed management within the park

— Degree of difficulty

— Views and flow levels for users to see each other to ensure maximum safety

Examples of functionality would include:

— The park capacity

— Attached seating and social areas

— Safety considerations including appropriate drainage

— Visual appeal

— Appropriate landscaping creating an area where people want to be

For a park to become a success it requires both of these aspects to be integrated into any design recognising that this is a simple recreational area that should attract people to it so it must be both visually and functionally attractive.

The design must cater for high demand levels. A park that only allows one skater to use it at a time is unlikely to be successful and so designers need to create various 'zones' to allow for variations of skateboarding practice to be possible simultaneously.

Skatepark Design

The skatepark should be designed with multiple users in mind. Therefore, creating different areas within the park where multiple users can explore their creativity is important. Thinking of the park as a multi-occupancy facility with the various parts of the park having different functions allows for more users than just an 'open plan' facility.

Creating these individual 'zones' within the park in much the same way as designing a house or office layout would require thought as to what activity was to be delivered within it. This would allow for these individual areas to be used independently of one another.

An example of failing to consider the implications of poor design would be a 6,000sqft park area that is divided into two large areas of 3,000sqft each. This would allow only a small number of users at any one time when this size could possibly accommodate 40-50 users with a more practical design.

Whatever the size or amount of 'zones' within the park, it is vital that it's aesthetics appeal to the users. This aesthetic appeal is used to stimulate the creativity of the user and generate more interest.

Skateboarding Disciplines

There are principally two types of skateboarder. There those that prefer the:

- **Street Terrain:** This relates to the type of environment where many learn the skills and use generally available social features such as rails, kerbs and jumps
- **Transition Terrain:** this relates to those who favour hollows, curves and bowls

Both types of environment needs to be considered and provided for within the park design if possible.

Construction Considerations

Authorities considering construction or looking to decide a planning application must also consider the construction of such parks with many providers placing emphasis on cost savings that can be made with statements such as:

- 'For a fraction of the cost of...'
- 'Lifetime warranties'
- 'What the Professional skateboarders prefer'

It is important to think about the users whose skills will quickly grow beyond the capabilities of the park offering. The costs of creating the facility in comparison to ongoing maintenance, particularly where cost challenges the design. Ongoing operating and maintenance costs of the facility over at least a 10 year period should be considered. Above-ground ramps and prefabricated structures, particularly polymer, wood, and steel materials maintain a potential for escalating maintenance costs and concerns.

Any skatepark is only as strong as its weakest component. Whenever a structure uses a steel transition plate to bridge the surface of the slab with the surface of the ramp, it doesn't matter how strong the ramp is, the transition plate will likely be the point of failure. No skatepark should ever feature transition plates.

Prefabricated ramps are ideal for temporary, private or residential applications, such as a backyard ramp, but maintain the potential for failure when used within municipal facilities.

Concrete is unequivocally the only material that should be considered for public municipal skateparks.

Proper signage is essential with regular inspections to assess vandalism, damage, or graffiti that could undermine the impact of the signage.

Facilities

Any newly developed skatepark needs to ensure that it caters for the needs of those using the space.

Consideration must be given to access to seating, basic hydration and toilet facilities. Furthermore, there needs to be litter bins provided and, if contained within a grassed park, dog toilet bins to ensure it remains clean and hygienic for the users. Further considerations include the possibility of functional lighting and the use of CCTV for safety and security purposes.

Whatever the organisation decides, it must engage with the user groups who will be most likely to benefit from the facility to ensure that the park is a prized local asset rather than a huge white elephant.

Risk Assessment, Monitoring and Review

Fundamentally, skateparks present inherent risks by virtue of the activities that they encourage to be undertaken. The challenge for Local Authorities and others who provide skatepark facilities is to strike a balance between encouraging users to enjoy the utility of such facilities in order to maximise their value, and not exposing the users to a significant or unreasonable risk of harm.

In order to achieve this, organisations must rely upon the relevant British Standards, and also ensure that a comprehensive risk assessment is completed for each park, which is reviewed at regular frequencies.

References

- 1** BS EN 14974:2019 - Skateparks - safety requirements and test methods, available here: <https://www.en-standard.eu/bs-en-14974-2019-skateparks-safety-requirements-and-test-methods/>
- 2** How skate parks can reduce local government risk, LGIS, available here: <https://riskmatterslgis.com.au/2020/10/how-skate-parks-can-reduce-local-government-risk/>
- 3** Red Bull, 9 benefits of skateboarding, available here: <https://www.redbull.com/us-en/benefits-skateboarding>
- 4** 'Skateboarding defies the neoliberal logic of the city by making it a playground for all' 21/2/2019 Independent News by Iain Borden. Professor of Architecture, UCL. Available here: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/skateboarding-london-city-playground-university-college-a8790016.html>

Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

Get in touch

For more information, please contact your broker, RMP risk control consultant or account director.

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