Youth focus

Following the recent cuts to Wiltshire Council (WC) funding for youth services, and taking into account WC's appointment of Emma Coombes to hold responsibility for Youth Services, Cllr Pam Bennett undertook an audit of what is on offer to our young people here in Winsley.

The purpose of this exercise was to be able to brief Emma on what we already got and to gauge what gaps, if any, there might be.

Looked at in the round, the overall conclusion is that there is considerable provision in place, both indoors and out, for sport and other activities.

In more detail, Winsley has a number of outdoor and indoor spaces available to the community and these are used regularly by local groups. For children who have outgrown the playground at White Horse Road, there is football, rugby and cricket; the Scouts, church youth club and the more recently established chess club. All offer regular, supervised activities.

On behalf of Winsley Parish Council (WPC) may I thank and express our appreciation to all who are involved in running these activities for the benefit of our young people.

Against that background, Emma Coombs was invited to speak to the February meeting of the Parish Council (PC). Emma explained her current role and we were able to ask her what she – and WC – might be able to offer our young people, particularly those in the 10-16 age bracket.

Also present at that meeting were a number of teenagers, mostly boys, who raised with us the question of how the PC could support their interest in and passion for skateboarding. As a result of this approach a working party has been set up, comprising Emma Coombs, Cllr Magnus MacDonald (our WC Cllr) and Alex Halls, a local skateboarder, to investigate possible locations and designs for a skate board facility in Winsley.

I was asked by Cllr Bennett if I would be the PC's link with this working party.

For this evening, we did invite, and had hoped, that both Emma and Alex would be here to present the case and to outline their findings thus far. However, Emma is running a Youth Club this evening and Alex is in the middle of his GCSE exams, so, unfortunately, neither can be with us.

It is clear that the prospect of a skateboard facility does cause some within our community to have misgivings. The PC, nevertheless, is keen to explore and reach an accommodation that satisfies if not all then most of the members of our community.

As you will readily appreciate, we are still at a very early stage, which is why we had seen this evening as providing a first opportunity for us to think about what is being asked for. What the young people would like is something suitable for beginners and

novices growing in confidence and dexterity, between the ages of 10 and 16. The minimum this might be would be a flat or slightly sloping surface area and a half pipe.

As your Parish Council, we can see several challenges. First, what land would be suitable and might it be available? Second, the cost involved and how could that money be raised? Third, will the community give its support to the young people, both to have the facility and then financially?

The working party is looking into the feasibility and, at this stage, it is too early to tell whether or not a proposal will materialise. We do know that other communities, not dissimilar to Winsley, have been able to raise the money and provide a facility.

We will keep residents informed of any developments; in the meantime, we wish to acknowledge and respect the initiative of the young people concerned, whose voice must be heard in an equally polite and constructive manner.

On another topic, the PC has been approached recently about the use of the field which fronts the Avon Park development.This field is owned by the PC.

Two conversations are currently underway, led by Cllr Linda Ladner.

The first is with a local organisation wishing to find facilities to offer football to children from Bradford on Avon and Winsley in the 5-8 age group.

The second is with the local Scouts.

The PC is keen to see the field used and used regularly by our youngsters. We are currently awaiting a formal proposal from the footballers. We will then consider the wider implications of their proposal, including shared use with the Scouts, before any formal agreement is reached.

Residents will be informed in the usual way if there are any developments.

To sum up, Winsley provides well for its young people and, if the proposals for the parish field materialise, we hope to see something more in the near future.

Thank you for your attention.

Cllr Philip Poulsom