



Board games

A MAKEOVER OF A VINTAGE BUT CHERISHED SKATE PARK AND A PIONEERING MEDICAL CENTRE WILL PUT HARROW'S SPORT AND LEISURE ON THE MAP

Words James Wood

Skateboarding, once largely a niche pastime of Californians in the 1970s, is now a global phenomenon. And Harrow is home to one of the UK's only skate parks from this era, built in 1976, which is equally popular with a growing number of BMX enthusiasts and rollerskaters.

Harrow's skate park is compared favourably to some of the best-known venues in the world, which are largely found in the west coast of America. The variety of features such as bowls, the snake, the swimming pool and the half pipe have been revered for decades by those who use it.

It is respected by some of the pursuit's biggest names, including Tony Hawk, who is seen by those in the know as someone who helped catapult boarding's popularity and success on to a world stage. The council-owned facility is located next to Harrow Leisure Centre in Wealdstone, which is soon to be the subject

of a major planning proposal from Harrow Council. The new scheme is expected not only to include better leisure facilities but will include housing and new public space.

Communicating with the people who use the facilities is key to bringing the masterplan to fruition and ensuring success.

The Skate Park Users Group has been involved with discussions since the beginning. The group would love to see new facilities installed, as well as improvements to the existing ramps and rails which make the park so unique.

Robert Adler, chair of the users group, explains: "London is crying out for a premier skate park and we could make this the biggest in the country: we will put Harrow on the map. We want to build a skateboarding heritage for the future, not just for Harrow, but the whole country."

WE WANT TO BUILD A SKATEBOARDING HERITAGE FOR THE FUTURE

Below: Harrow skate park has had a long and colourful history since it was built in the 1970s, attracting a loyal and active band of supporters.



“We are working directly with the council in our proposal to expand the park and develop modern facilities that can fit in with what’s already there.”

Yet the skate park’s continued existence is something of a feat. The site has been earmarked for redevelopment on more than one occasion including proposals to concrete over the facility – the users group was formed in 1997, largely in opposition to plans to bulldoze the park.

“A group of 10 of us chained ourselves to the gates, so to speak,” says Adler. “It was an effort to keep the site open. We did close for a while, eventually relaunching in 2003, after we managed to raise around £60,000 from groups including the Metropolitan Police.”

The current leisure centre, also built in the 1970s, features a gymnasium, tennis and squash courts, dance studios, a boules pitch and a more recently-installed bouldering wall.

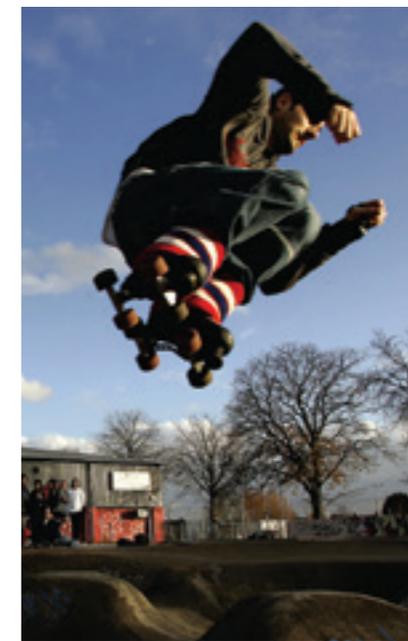
Following an initial feasibility study led by GortScott architects, the council will talk to all users to develop viable options for better leisure facilities as part of the mixed-use development, including a build-to-rent component and affordable and market sale housing to cross-subsidise the works.

A key aim is to integrate the sports facilities with public spaces to host a range of recreational events with the skate park remaining a significant feature.

Recognising the iconic nature of the skate



Below left: Synchro spins – Ryan Barber (left) and Joshua Jones demonstrate their BMX skills. Below right: Rob Adler, chair of the skate park’s users group.



park, the council is considering options like developing areas for a range of users, including the growing popularity of BMX.

Plans will also include improving access to Byron Park next to the leisure centre with its links to walking routes to the station and the centre of Wealdstone.

Already participation is up at the leisure centre, operated by award-winning company Everyone Active. It has secured £10,000 to deliver 300 health checks for Harrow residents between the ages of 40 and 74 over a year until September.

The organisation won the sought-after Customer Service Excellence Standard in 2015 and is recognised for its work in helping

disabled people take part in sport by the English Federation of Disability Sport.

Harrow is also home to the first gym in Europe for disabled and non-disabled people at the Aspire Centre in Stanmore. Around a third of the facility’s members are disabled, compared with the two to three per cent average in other UK fitness centres. The centre was shortlisted for Best Rehabilitation Facility of the Year, an award given by Script Events in partnership with *Workout* magazine.

For Harrow’s residents, there are abundant opportunities to keep fit and as Harrow’s population continues to grow so does the need for more health and fitness activities. Impressive leisure facilities act as a magnet for people looking to adopt a healthy lifestyle. ▶▶

HOME TO THE FIRST GYM IN EUROPE FOR DISABLED AND NON-DISABLED PEOPLE

Top to bottom: Aspire Centre, Stanmore; Harrow Leisure Centre pool, BMX rider Joshua Jones, Aspire, Barnet FC's right-back Andy Yiadom.



Getting all user groups on board with the council's plans will help to ensure the success of the latest initiative to redevelop the leisure centre.

Joshua Jones, a BMX user, who frequents the park, sums up what it means to him: "It's a place where anyone can come down, there's no judgement and everyone gets on."

"It's a great piece of history as well and I've made a lot of lifelong friends just from BMX."

By acknowledging the desires of local groups, recognising the heritage benefits of the skate park and applying careful consideration on how to integrate leisure and residential features together, the project has the potential to further boost Harrow's prospects as a destination for sport and leisure activities. ♦



A GREAT PIECE OF HISTORY AS WELL AND I'VE MADE A LOT OF LIFELONG FRIENDS FROM BMX

ALTERED IMAGES

League football came to north-west London for the first time in 2015, when Barnet Football Club was promoted to League Two with a 2-0 win against Gateshead on 25 April.

The club has operated from The Hive stadium, Edgware, since 2013 and features a training ground and centre of excellence, opened by ex-England player Trevor Brooking and ex-England manager, Fabio Capello in 2009.

There are facilities for the community including artificial and floodlit grass pitches to hire. A fitness centre features treadmills, cardiovascular machines, weight resistance machines and weight training, meaning The Hive Gym is fully equipped for those aiming to stick to their fitness regime - if they

can resist the temptation of the bar and restaurant.

The site will also be home to an advanced medical centre for sports injuries that will be the first of its kind in the country. It will provide footballers and athletes with early diagnosis in the UK using the latest scanning equipment and treatment if needed, and it will also be available to local hospitals.

The new centre, developed by Toshiba Medical Systems and the club, will also set up the UK's first imaging academy for radiology professionals. The aim is that the academy will be a national leader in radiology education, with classrooms and a lecture hall holding up to 500 students.



Chairman of Barnet FC and The Hive, Tony Kleanthous, is excited about the proposals: "We're looking to develop a medical facility the likes of which has not been seen in the UK before. Toshiba will establish an imaging academy at The Hive. It will be a facility for our players, and those from around London can take advantage of world-class scanning technology as part of player welfare efforts."

"What we have here at The Hive is an international-class facility that is not only open and accessible to the football elite but also to the local community too. Our aim for the medical centre is exactly that - to develop a world-class medical facility alongside our sports facility."