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11<sup>th</sup> August 2021

Dear Mr Hollinrake MP

### **Saving the Halfpipe, Norton Skate Park**

We understand that Ryan Swain, Campaign Leader, and Martin Brampton, Chair of Malton and Norton Area Partnership (MNAP) have already written to you to seek your intervention in rescuing this iconic vert ramp, one of only ten left in the UK.

MNAP were asked by Norton Town Council (NTC) to take over responsibility for managing the project to fruition. MNAP were progressing well in partnership with Ryan Swain and his group of community volunteers and businesses. Phase 1 of the project – stripping back the structure to a steel frame – was completed by these community volunteers and businesses. But Norton Town Council stopped the project at its July council meeting and MNAP and the campaign team have been let down considerably, as well as being treated poorly by NTC.

As residents and citizens of Norton, we too have been let down and treated badly. We had to write to you as we have become disillusioned and appalled by the decision taken by a number of Norton town councillors, and their attitudes to the project and its supporters. It is our firm opinion that those Council members are not acting in the interests of the community or listening to their views; they are not open to rational discussion, and the reasons they have given for not supporting the development work to save the ramp are not insurmountable ones and are lacking in any substance.

Public support has been immense and still is mounting to save the ramp, but our voices are not being listened to respectfully. For five councillors to crush the wishes of a community and to throw members of that community out of a council meeting, is an affront to local democracy and good governance. We have been branded as ‘deluded’ campaigners. We are the community. When we ask for answers either through FOI requests (not forthcoming) or directly, we do not receive them. Their approach has been non-conciliatory, obstructive and combative.

The Health and Safety and liability issues, which have been a large part of the NTC’s argument for not progressing the project, have been explored in

great detail with expertise and can be refuted. The costs that the Council mention to get the Halfpipe up and running is misinformation. Funding was secured to deliver its renovation, at no cost to the Council. The structure would not need to be supervised when in use, another misrepresented cost. The obstruction by Council has been the prime risk to financing the project, as their delays have risked sponsorship and funding deals that the campaign had in place.

The issue of the Fitzwilliam Estate lease is a red herring. The lease has been renewed for a further three years as has always been the case as this land is on a three-year rolling lease. This was confirmed by the Estate to the community in a statement made last week.

Let us be clear. If the Council had agreed to Phase 2, the renovations would have been completed by the end of next month and because of the expertise and input from the users and suppliers involved in delivering it, the Halfpipe would be the safest structure in the Skatepark. The work the Council approved, at a cost, for the rest of the Skatepark equipment upgrade, was carried out without user consultation and as such its upgrade is below par.

As a result of NTC's decision not to support Phase 2 of the project, by a single vote, the community has rallied. We convened a Town Meeting on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> August, and we attach the draft notes and video recording link of the meeting so that you can understand and witness the feelings within our community and the poor response by the Council. At this meeting the Council refused to answer questions raised by our community. We therefore called for an Extraordinary Meeting of Council to discuss the matter with urgency, which was agreed to by the Mayor, Ann Spencer, at the Town Meeting.

However, we know the position of the five on council and that they are seemingly determined to obstruct the project. They say they are waiting for proposals. They had one, they quashed it, and any new proposal would be met by the same mindset. This is our opinion based on the Council's actions to date. We would have hoped that the Council had the maturity and ambition to look at how we can deliver the project, to back fundraising ideas, to present ideas themselves, and to work together to make our community happy. This is not the attitude they appear willing to adopt.

This asset is of huge value to the community. Not only because of its value to heritage, but because of what it brings to users of the skatepark and to our community. It is inspirational and aspirational; it builds confidence, strength, determination and skills. It provides a safe place for people across the ages to take part in a sport, make friendships and learn. The positive contribution to well-being and mental health should not be underestimated. The whole project has other exciting strands to it around

teaching and mentoring of younger people delivered by the expertise of more skilled users. It really could offer something vibrant and positive to the community.

We talk of levelling up in the North. How can this be achieved when provision of free, local sport facilities is hampered through obstinacy and lethargy by a small number on a council who are out of touch with its community's wishes?

As a result of Council's actions and behaviour, there is growing unrest and dissatisfaction with our representatives. This matter will be long remembered when it next comes to future elections, not just on Town Council, but at County Council level too. We want representatives who listen, who care about youth facilities, sports, mental well-being and who have the drive and energy to accomplish and deliver positive change.

We are also writing to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport so that he too is aware of the struggle we are facing in our attempts to preserve heritage and celebrate sports. We are inspired by Olympians who strive to the best of their abilities, and we particularly note Sky Brown who brought home a Bronze in the Tokyo Olympics for Great Britain. These are the role models we aspire to, and we wish for our future generations to feel the same. Why are we having to go to such lengths to deliver the best for our communities only to be hampered by those who are meant to represent community interests? If we want to be 'Great' we need people to act Great.

We implore you to intervene in this sorry state of affairs.

Yours sincerely

Marc Fothergill (Resident and Citizen of Norton)

[SUPPORTERS NAMES TO BE ADDED]

Cc. Oliver Dowden MP, Secretary of State, Digital, Culture, Media & Sport: [oliver.dowden.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:oliver.dowden.mp@parliament.uk)

Encs. Norton Town meeting re. The Halfpipe, 5<sup>th</sup> August 2021

- Draft minutes: <https://e.pcloud.link/publink/show...>
- Filmed recording: [https://youtu.be/aYCI\\_hKZpPY](https://youtu.be/aYCI_hKZpPY)