



# West Moors skatepark – year one monitoring final report



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*"Already the original 'spirit' of the park has returned, to the extent where not only the locals have returned but also people that have travelled from all over the South to come and experience the new park."*

Edited by Caro Hart of Dorset Community Action with contributions from Amie Fawcett and the skateboarders, bikers and scooter-riders using West Moors Skatepark. With thanks to: [Veolia Environmental Trust](#), [The National Lottery Community Fund](#), [Tesco's Bags of Help \(Groundwork UK\)](#) and Dorset Council.

## 1. Background

On Tuesday 22nd June 2021, work commenced on the new West Moors skate park. The rusted structure of the much-loved original park, which was built in 2003, was demolished and the new concrete park was started.



This beginning was the result of a long journey. Spearheaded by West Moors Town Council and the West Moors Skate Park Action group, community consultation took place and a fundraising campaign was set in motion.

In September 2019 a consultation took place on the future of the skate park, culminating in a community Skate Party. This took place in howling rain but was enjoyed by dozens of people who came to talk about the future of the skate park and have fun. This was turned into a video and the campaign was launched.

In March 2020 West Moors Town Council approved the contractor CANVAS to design the new skate park and, although slowed down by the pandemic, the fundraising continued. By early 2021, more than 75% of the full cost of £200,000 had been raised with grants of £75,985 from The National Lottery Community Fund, £75,000 from Veolia Environmental Trust, Tesco's *bags of help* and £1,500 from Dorset Council Leisure Development Fund. West Moors Town Council met the rest of the cost from its reserves.

By the beginning of September 2021 the new park was completed and on Friday 24<sup>th</sup>, users were allowed to test it out for the first time. The official launch was on October 15<sup>th</sup> 2021.

We interviewed several of the people involved in the creation of the park from contractors CANVAS who said that they had been impressed by the clarity of vision for the new park that came from the community involvement and the discussions with skateboarders and young people. This meant that the design was:



*"... accessible for everyone – a lot of parks specialise, but this is a park for all ages to get involved and start from the ground up if they want to, and then go on to other parks."*

*"We made sure that there were some of the things people know and loved; the half pipe area is the same dimensions as the old one, just more exciting as it is really smooth."*

The skatepark is guaranteed for at least 25 years and is very low maintenance, which, although it is built of concrete, reduces its environmental footprint.



## 2. Methodology



Throughout the first year of operation, West Moors Town Council monitored the difference the project made to the people who use it, to the local community and to the skateboarding community themselves. We took a different focus for each quarterly report so that, together they showed the progress and outcomes of the project.

Roughly speaking, the focus for the different quarters was:

✓ Quarter one report: Using interviews and information from a

community questionnaire which ran across the period of the launch in October 2021

✓ Quarter two report: Getting under the skin of why people use the skatepark and what they get out of it.

✓ Quarter three report: Looking at the detail of usage statistics and the mixture of different things the skatepark is used for.

✓ Quarter four report: Community reactions as we approach the anniversary of the park being open and from the Westival event, including a further community questionnaire. (We have interspersed the comments we received during the two community engagements exercises, throughout this report in *italics*.)

We assessed the numbers of people using the skate park by sampling the CCTV footage anonymously and using this to estimate the usage across the whole month. The data is split between periods of usage at weekends and on weekdays.

We have also grouped figures into age groups so that we can see the patterns of use in more detail. This method of counting cannot identify repeat visitors and so what we are counting is number of discrete visits across a period. Indeed, it is to be hoped that individuals and families frequently return to the skatepark. However, this is similar in method to the baseline of 60 young people per month that was taken originally and so it is felt to be a useful measure of progress.

## 3. The difference the project wanted to make.

The outcomes to be achieved as detailed in the application were ambitious. As well as the physical update of the facilities, the targets set were, overall:

- To increase usage of the skate park from an estimated 60 young people per month to 150 people per month
- To improve health & wellbeing
- To reduce anti-social behaviour locally
- To improve performance and fulfil potential
- To increase community cohesion

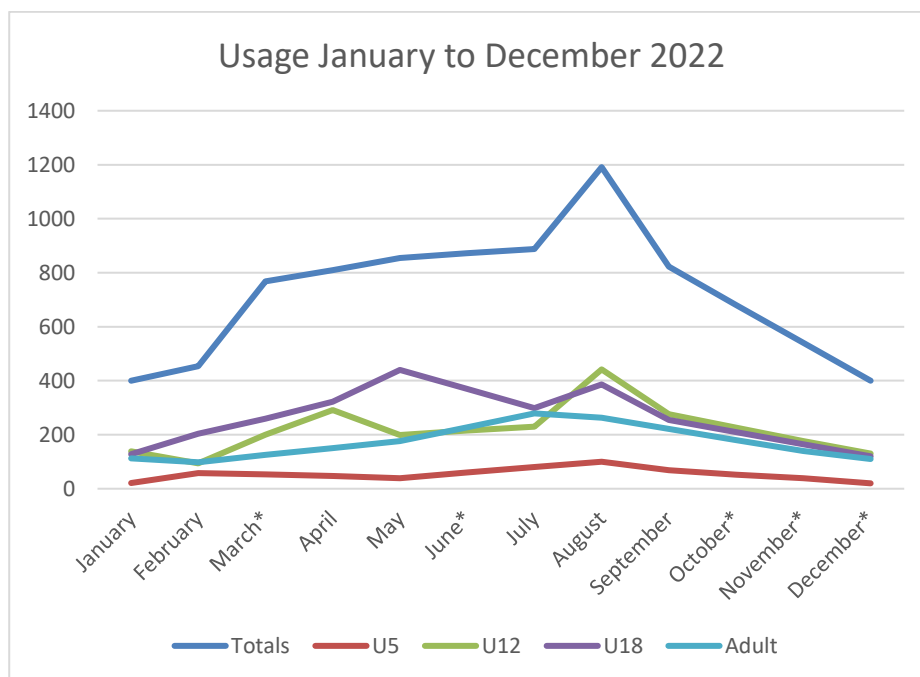
These are the targets we monitored against across the first year of the skate park being open.

## 4. The difference the project made

### 4.1 To increase usage of the skate park

#### 4.1.1 Statistics

In this area, the project has been a terrific success. The target was to increase to 150 young people per month using the skate park from an estimated 60 people per month. As can be seen in the chart below, usage of the skatepark steadily rose from the beginning of 2022<sup>1</sup> since the beginning of the year, peaking in the summer holidays, but building a solid base of usage that is many times what it was before the park was re-built. In fact, in August, over 900 visits were made by young people or children to the skate park which is *six times* greater than the project's original targets. We estimate that by the end of the year<sup>2</sup>, around 8,500 visits will have been made to the skate park of which more than 6,500 will be by young people or children.



It has been interesting that the usage in particular age-groups has changed during the year. Usage by teenagers (under 18 years old) was predominant in the Spring and early Summer. When the school holidays arrived, the younger age group (under 12 years old) became the biggest user group, often as part of a family group with parents or older siblings. Adults, alone or with other adults, used the skate park more in the Summer evenings, often until dusk. We saw quite a lot of socializing around the skate park in all age groups with people coming to cheer on their friends or hang out.

All the way along, there has been a good population of very small children, often on scooters or balance bikes just starting to acquire the skills they can see in others.

❖ *It gives children something different to want to learn and try*

<sup>1</sup> You will note that we did not monitor usage October to December 2021.

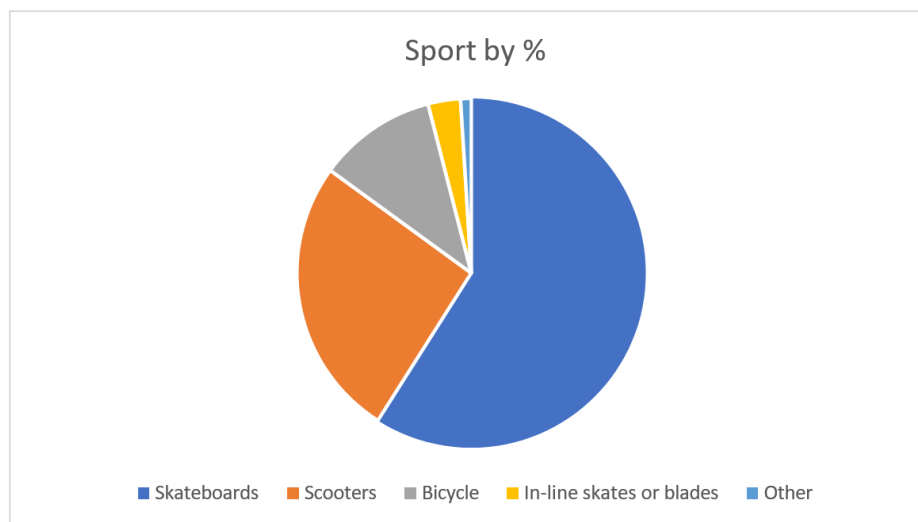
<sup>2</sup> Months with an asterisk are estimated based on previous data.



#### 4.1.2 Types of use

In quarter two we analysed data collected on usage of the skatepark, not only in terms of numbers and age groups, but by the choice of sport. As might have been expected, more than half of people (59%) chose the skateboard (or baby-board).

Most of these were older teens or adults, with adults almost exclusively riding skateboards. A quarter (26%) rode a scooter, mostly people in the under 12 age group and 11% rode a bicycle (or balance bike) and these people tended to be younger teens. We noticed a significant number of people, usually teens, who came with their friends, often with a dog or two, and watched, indicating that the skatepark is acting as a social hub.



Under “other” came people playing ball games and an enterprising father and son running a remote-control car over the course.

## 4.2 To improve health & wellbeing

### 4.2.1 Physical & mental health and wellbeing

We asked people in the initial survey what they thought the benefits of the new skatepark would be. Many mentioned physical wellbeing and fitness:

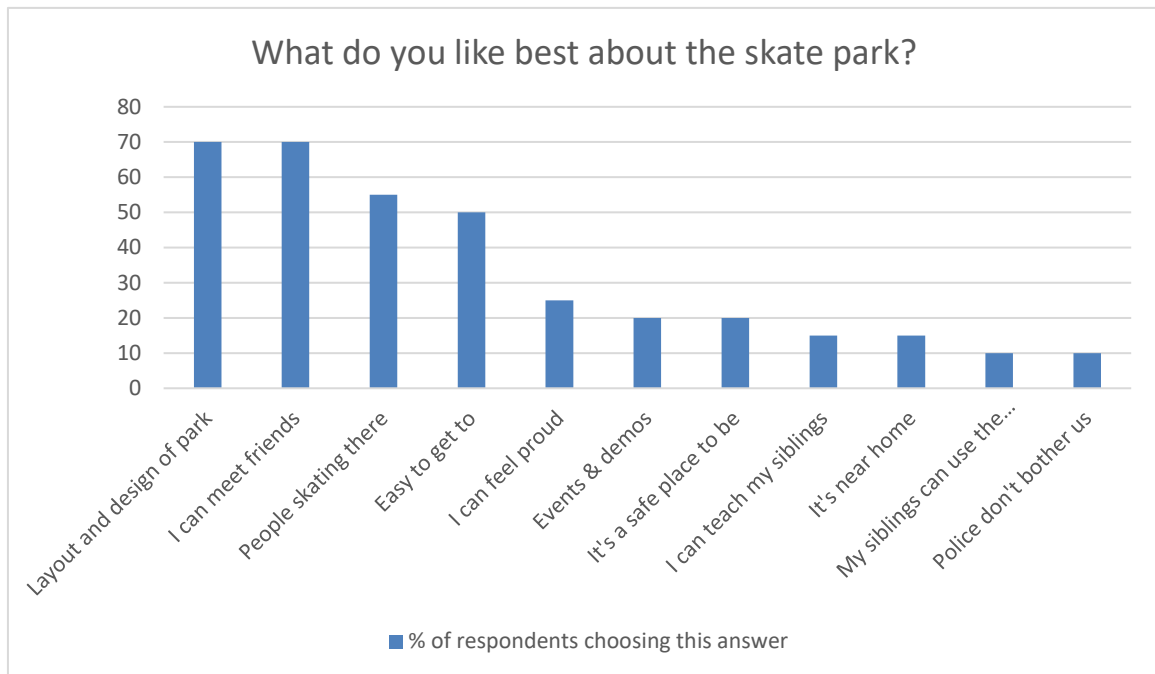
- ❖ *Exercise, getting out and boarders are a friendly and inclusive*
- ❖ *Get people outside – more fresh air and exercise*
- ❖ *Good exercise for the youngsters and get them off the computer*

When we did the second community survey, the vast majority (80%) of people said that the main reason they skate or ride is for exercise.

People in both surveys mentioned social and mental health benefits:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| ❖ <i>Good place to meet friends</i>           | ❖ <i>Place for exercise and hobbies</i>                                  |
| ❖ <i>Focal point for families and friends</i> | ❖ <i>They can have a hobby that gets them outside and doing exercise</i> |
| ❖ <i>Help people socialize more</i>           | ❖ <i>Better mental and physical health</i>                               |
| ❖ <i>Helps with mental health issues</i>      |  |
| ❖ <i>Safe place, to meet friends</i>          |  |

Our results indicate the skate park seems to provide what this community needs individually and collectively. A year on from its early opening, we asked the question; *What do you like best about the skate park?* This produced the following ideas:



There is no doubt that this objective has been met. There is a great deal of evidence that people use the skate park to improve their physical and mental health, whether that's to make new friends and meet socially or to be alone and use exercise as a stress-buster.

#### 4.2.2 A sense of community

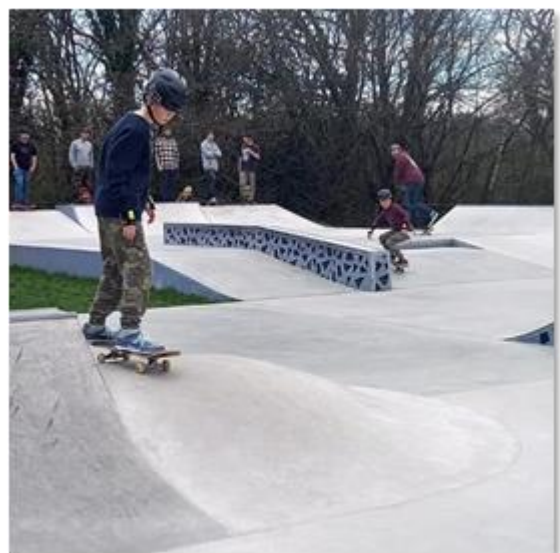
There is also the sense of community that is created between people who are using the skate park. This was an unexpected outcome of the project. We discovered that the willingness of people to help others was a key part of what users of the skate park, especially newcomers, got out of the experience.

*"...we've just moved here with a 10-year-old daughter (who) doesn't know anyone so she has already started meeting local people who share the same interests."*

*"I've taken my 9-year-old down a couple of times and every time there have been teens and older there, and always fully respectful of my doddering learner."*

*"Lots of people to help me out"*

*"The new park is banging. We come all the time as we are beginners, and there are so many other people that are skilled here, we can watch and learn and ask questions because everyone is so friendly"*.



*"I come here much more now that it has been rebuilt. I like that it has a bit of everything and is also different from other parks in the area. I learnt skating during lockdown and this park was a great place to find my feet."*

*"The skateboard community is so friendly and inclusive, that's something I didn't realise before coming to the park. I like that we see the same people when we come and always share conversation."*

#### 4.2.2 A sense of self

We also discovered that it is an important part of personal identity. We asked people who skateboard or ride bikes or scooters, about how this made them feel and about other ways in which being part of the community helped them. More than a third of respondents (36%) said that their skate-boarding identity was the most important aspect of how they self-identify, listing it as more important than gender, socio- economic status or racial identity. Just under half of younger respondents (46%) said that they would take advice on their future from people who skate professionally and more than a quarter (27%) said the same about the skating community generally. This shows the great impact that the sense of community has, particularly on younger people. It also demonstrates the willingness to help each other within that community.



In general, people perceive that community to be quite open minded and inclusive. We asked if people felt that their racial identity affected how they were treated by; a) other skateboarders and; b) by non-skateboarders

Two thirds (67%) of people felt that how the skateboarding community perceived them wasn't affected by their racial identity – vs one third (33%) of people who said that the perceptions of non-skateboarders were not affected by their racial identity.

Similarly, half (50%) of respondents said that they felt that their gender identity did not affect how other skateboarders perceived them whereas with non-skateboarders, they only felt that way a third of the time (33%).

It can therefore be said that the objectives in this area have been met, including in some complex and profound ways that help peoples' sense of connection and belonging.



#### 4.3 To reduce anti-social behaviour locally

This is the sole area where the project has produced fewer concrete outcomes. West Moors historically does not have a large problem with anti-social behaviour. One of the designers involved with the park from CANVAS said that:

*"A good local skatepark stops kids getting into trouble – skateboarding is a very community focused exercise – it's good for people. There used to have a stigma, skateboarding was,*



*associated with anti-social behaviour, but now its seen as beneficial for people in the community. We like to see the younger ones develop – see people develop and make connections – it’s a community thing.”*

Having a larger, well-designed park in the space makes it more likely that a wide variety of people will be able to use it on a regular basis. In the community surveys, respondents identified the benefits of the skate park as:

*“...place for youths to go, rather than hanging out on the streets”*

*“For the younger ones - very much the same as when I was a youngster using the park. Something to focus your energy and effort into and a place to appropriately and positively blow off some steam.”*

Perhaps most, crucially, the new skate park is thought of as a “safe” place for young people with 75% of respondents in the second community survey saying that the main benefit of the skate park was that is a safe space for young people. It is perceived by a large number (60%) as a nice place for families to come with smaller children and half (50%) saying that it creates a focal point for the community.

*“Gets people in the local community meeting each other and making new friends”*

Even a year on, the skate park is pristine and well-kept, with no graffiti or vandalism, which indicates the respect the community affords it.

*“There seems to be a really good spirit of the users down there. No graffiti, no damage. It’s really good to see.”*



#### 4.4 To improve performance and fulfil potential

##### 4.4.1 The design of the park



Much was discussed, initially, about the new park’s accessibility for people of all ages and levels of ability and that it provided an attractive starting point for learning. CANVAS’ designer commented:

*“You don’t necessarily need the bigger ramps you can progress on lower ramps just as much learning to do more technical tricks...”*

Respondents in the second community survey who skateboarded said that the (joint) most liked thing (70% of people chose this) about the new skate park was the layout and design. Respondents to both surveys commented:

*“(The) improved skate park will cater to everyone’s style of skating so will improve confidence and produce athletes”*

*“The layout is brilliant, the park is really good fun and it allows people to progress comfortably”*

#### 4.4.2 Personal improvement

We asked people who skate or ride about whether they thought the new skate park would help them to get better. In the original survey 70% said yes and by the time the second survey this had risen to 90% indicating that people are really finding the skate park helps them to improve.

*“There are things at West Moors new skatepark that I do not have at my local skatepark, this could help me learn new tricks and improve my skating career.”*

Several people spoke of how their confidence increased with practice, enhanced by the fact that the skate park was so much better than before.

In the second community survey we asked *Do you think having a better skate park will mean you use it more?* 100% of respondents said that it would. Comments included:

- *It will help me improve my skating and gain confidence.*
- *It's easy to ride on a learn*
- *I can learn new tricks on different obstacles*

One respondent also commented that it might enable someone to become a professional athlete. Grassroots skate parks like West Moors have indeed produced both Olympic Games participants and professional skateboarders.

*“Will make them better, gain confidence, will help them get better in comps. (competitions) And bigger parks”*

*“A focal point for youth and exercise for everyone.”*

The research we have undertaken proves conclusively, that the project has succeeded in this objective and created a skate park where people can build confidence, learn from others and improve their skateboarding or riding.

Even experienced people can find something to try at West Moors skate park:

*“The new park not only brings new ramps & obstacles to make new memories on, but the layout used allows for a lot of fun, no matter how big or small you make your tricks.”*



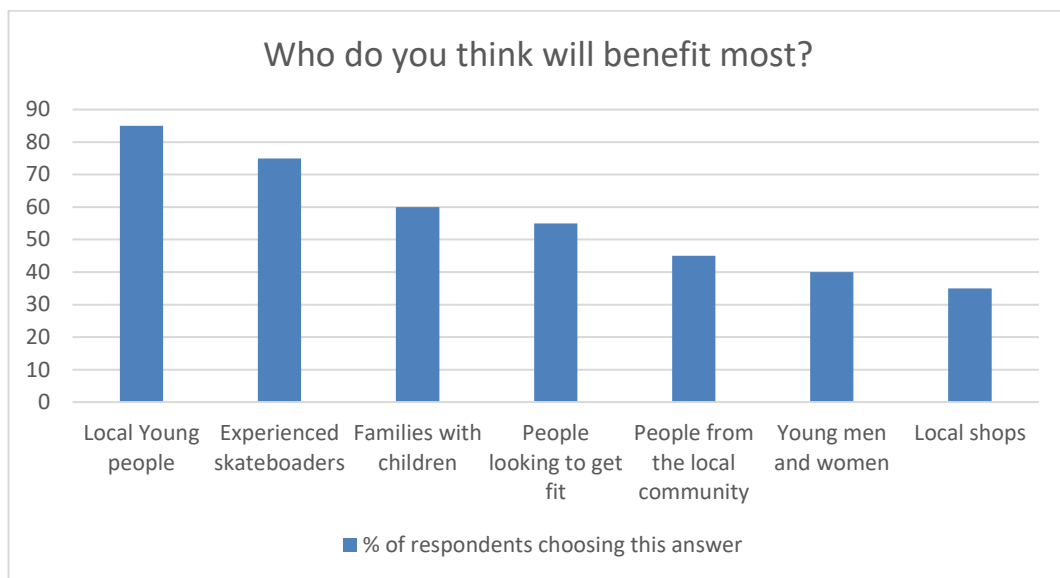
#### 4.5 To increase community cohesion

We asked in the first survey what people thought would be the benefits for the local community. Responses included:

- *Judging by the amount of people coming to skate the park from the neighbouring counties, hopefully some additional business to the local shops just down the road on the high street.*
- *Something productive to do, a feeling like the town is up and coming and has something particularly noteworthy to come to*

- *Create a community feel and get youngsters out more*
- *People using local shops and facilities*
- *For the locals, it's a great excuse to get outside, to get active and to socialise with old and new friends alike, especially after a long period of distancing and isolating*
- *Additional revenue to the local stores*
- *More communal*

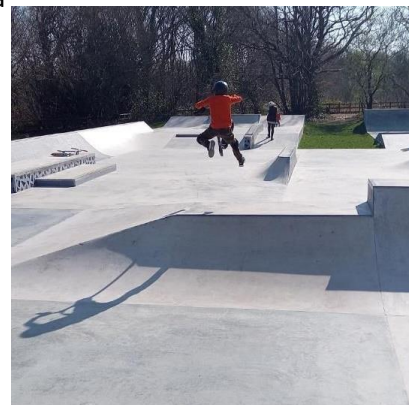
A year on, we asked *Who do you think will benefit most from the new skate park?* and the results were interesting with a heavy emphasis on the benefits for local young people. The answers were as follows:



The information we have gathered continues to emphasise that the new skatepark is creating opportunities for families to come to the park together and support one or more people to increase their skills. From the attendance, there is a good range of age groups using the park; all of whom are respectful of each-other.

*"It's getting children and adults in the local communities to go outdoors in the fresh air to exercise and socialise"*

- ❖ *Good for families & kids*
- ❖ *Lets kids focus on something progressive*
- ❖ *Fitness for my family and I*



We asked people what they thought the benefits were for the community and the answers included:

- ❖ *Tourism*
- ❖ *Outdoor time with friends*
- ❖ *Bringing more people to West Moors*
- ❖ *Good for the skate community*
- ❖ *It will get more people into sports*
- ❖ *Better community engagement*
- ❖ *Bring more money into the local shops*
- ❖ *Somewhere to learn to skate*

At the annual Westival” community event, we asked what things people liked best about having the new skate park. Most of the respondents were users of the facilities or their friends, so unsurprisingly more than half (55%) said that it was a good place to meet friends. However, the reason given in the majority of cases (75%) was that it is a safe place for young people to go and be outside. Half of the people we asked (50%) said that they thought the skate park created a focal point for the community – although some qualified that as the skateboarding community.



Other responses included that it was close to home (35%) and that it brought money into the local economy (35%). So it would seem that both local people and people from outside West Moors using the skate park bring advantages. Some people commented that the best thing was the events and demos – a timely observation given that it was Westival - and one person commented that their favourite thing about the skate park was that local skateboarders had been

able to have input into the design of the park. Clearly, they felt a sense of ownership.

This objective too seems to have been well accomplished. Not only is there a thriving skating community working together, with visitors from all over the area, but there is good integration with the local West Moors community. People seem very aware of the benefits of having a skatepark that people come to from all over.

In the main, though, it is the sense of all ages mingling and helping each other that shows the cohesion of the community centred on the skate park. Again and again, we have heard how experienced people help out newbies, how parents bring small children with teeny scooters or balance-bikes or how the skate park provides a social hub for mixed groups. In this respect, the environment that the project created has been a great success.

## 5. Conclusion

Overall, this has been a successful initiative. The physical development of the new skate park was delivered efficiently and its design greatly praised, especially in respect of the way in which the community was involved at those early stages.

The amount of people who have used the skate park in its first year has exceeded all expectations and the levels of engagement not only with teenagers but with younger children has been really impressive. The project has created a community feeling where different users are comfortable and feel safe using the skate park. Many people have gained a lot from being able to learn or practice their sport in a specially created space, including definite mental and physical benefits. From newbies to experienced people, they are able to gain in confidence and learn new things and, above all, have lots of fun!

Compliments to the team at West Moors Town Council, the West Moors skate park users’ group and thanks to the sponsors and funders for making this skate park a reality.

Caro Hart, Dorset Community Action  
October 2022