

# Okehampton Town Council Parks Committee 19<sup>th</sup> May 2025 Meeting Report

<b>Date:</b>	12 <sup>th</sup> May 2025
<b>Name:</b>	Emma James and Abi Horn

## 7. Simmons Park

### 7.1 To note the following updates:

- a) **Bookings - Events that have either taken place or are scheduled to take place in Simmons Park, subject to receipt of the necessary**

Name	Activity Name	Start Date
Amusement Fair	Fair	1-9 June 2025
Okeford Veterinary Centre Charity Dog Show	Dog Show	Sun 03/08/2025 08:00
Rotary Summer Fair	Rotary Fair	Sun 12/10/2025 00:00
Park Run	Park Run	Saturdays

### 7.5 River Risk Assessment – To consider the Risk Assessment and statement in relation to river safety

#### Risk Assessment for East Okement River, Simmons Park

**Location:** Simmons Park, Okehampton, Devon

**Date:** 26<sup>th</sup> March 2025

**Assessor:** A Horn

**Review Date:** March 2025

**Activity/Area:** East Okement River (Riverbank and Watercourse)

#### 1. Description of the Area

The East Okement River runs through Simmons Park, Okehampton, with the water typically less than 2 feet in height.

The riverbanks are steep and difficult to access, with natural barriers such as vegetation and plants intentionally grown along the river's edge to discourage public interaction.

Swimming, paddling, and access to the water are prohibited by park byelaws to ensure public safety. However, as Simmons Park is a Grade II listed park, the installation of signage is discouraged, meaning alternative safety measures must be emphasized.

#### 2. Identified Hazards

- **Access to the River:** Although the steep banks make it difficult for people to access the river, there is still a potential risk that someone could attempt to enter the water, especially in areas where the natural barriers are not sufficiently dense.
- **Inadvertent Entry:** Individuals, particularly children or vulnerable persons, may still be drawn to the river's edge, despite the steep slopes and barriers.

- Slips and Trips: The steep terrain around the riverbanks may present slip or trip hazards, particularly when the ground is wet.
- Drowning Risk: Although the water is generally shallow (less than 2 feet), accidents could still occur, especially if someone falls into the water unexpectedly.

### **3. Existing Control Measures**

- Prohibited Access: Swimming and paddling are prohibited by park byelaws, making it an offense for the public to engage in these activities.
- Steep Riverbanks: Some areas of Riverbank are steep therefore it significantly reduces the risk of accidental entry, as it is difficult for most individuals to access the water. Some areas are more accessible to access which then does not act as a deterrent.
- Natural Barriers: The park's maintenance team actively grows and maintains natural barriers (e.g., dense vegetation, plants, and bushes) along the river's edge to discourage public entry and prevent easy access to the water.
- Staff Awareness and Monitoring: Park staff are trained to observe and report any safety concerns, including damage to natural barriers or increased risks near the riverbank.

### **4. Additional Control Measures**

- Enhanced Natural Barriers: Given the restrictions on signage, priority should be placed on reinforcing natural barriers with additional planting in key areas where access may be more feasible.
- Public Awareness Through Alternative Means: Instead of traditional signage, consider using other methods such as:
  - Digital platforms (council website, social media) to educate the public about river safety.
  - Information boards at park entrances detailing general park safety, including river hazards.
  - Community engagement programs to inform local visitors and residents about water safety.
- Emergency Procedures: Ensure clear emergency response protocols are in place for staff in case of incidents, including awareness of emergency access points for rescue services.

### **5. Risk Level and Mitigation**

- Risk of Accessing the River: Low – The steep riverbanks and natural barriers remain the primary deterrents. Regular maintenance will ensure their continued effectiveness.
- Risk of Slips and Trips: Moderate – The natural terrain presents slip risks, especially in wet conditions. Parks team monitors and manages pathways accordingly.
- Risk of Drowning: Very Low – The river's shallow depth reduces the drowning risk, but accidental falls into the water could still pose a hazard.

## 6. Action Plan

- Ongoing Monitoring: Regular assessment of natural barriers to ensure they remain intact and effective in reducing accessibility.
- Public Engagement: Increase public education efforts via digital and community-based means rather than physical signage.
- Seasonal Inspections: Conduct additional checks in winter for erosion or damage to riverbanks and barriers caused by weather conditions.
- Emergency Access Awareness: Ensure that all park staff are aware of the nearest access points for emergency services in case of any incidents near the river.

## 7. Conclusion

Despite the absence of traditional signage due to the park's listed status, the risk associated with the East Okement River at Simmons Park remains low due to steep banks, natural barriers, and the prohibition of water-based activities. Regular maintenance and staff vigilance will ensure continued safety, while public education through alternative communication methods will further reduce potential risks.

If life rings were to be installed one would be required every 25 meters along the watercourse. Given the length of the river through the park, this would necessitate approximately 55 life rings, significantly impacting the park's visual and environmental integrity. Instead of physical installations, our approach focuses on proactive risk mitigation, including monitoring, emergency response planning, and raising awareness among visitors.

### Public Statement on Signage and Life Rings

Simmons Park is a designated Grade II listed park, which means that certain modifications, including the installation of modern signage, are discouraged to preserve its historic and natural character. In line with conservation guidelines, we have prioritised alternative safety measures such as reinforced natural barriers and public education, to ensure visitor safety around the East Okement River.

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We appreciate the public's understanding and cooperation in respecting the natural environment while enjoying the park safely.

## 8. Skatepark and BMX Track

### 8.1 **BMX/Pump Track Improvements** – To consider comments from members of the public and an update in relation to the tender award

Refurbishment of okehampton skate park. Surely you can put £30,000 to better use. Making improvements isn't going to stop the anti social behaviour and it will still be vandalized i live by the skate park and can't even enjoy a sunday afternoon in the good weather because of the noise and foul language it should of never been put there in the first place should of been out the park. Kind

**8.2 Fires** – To consider action to be taken following recent fire/s at this location.



**10. Other Areas and Updates**

**10.3 Parklands Leisure Centre – To consider correspondence from a member of the public.**

As a member of Parklands Leisure Centre I would like to raise the following concerns with the Town Council Parks Committee:-

- a) Faulty equipment - months to repair.
- b) Reduction in staff numbers despite increases in member numbers. Unsupervised gym sessions for junior sessions.
- c) Lift not working for 18 months meaning myself and many disabled users cannot access gym or fitness classes - how can we completely ignore the physical and consequential mental health of townsfolk who need support the most?
- d) apparent lack of interest or investment from Fusion Lifestyle Head Office. Signs of the contract being 'run into the ground'.

I see from the Town Council minutes that the Parklands User Group has not met or inspected since May 2024. Even then only [REDACTED] attended and nothing was reported - how was the inoperative lift not seen?

Shocked that the Town Council cant find the time to visit or discuss such an important public facility. Yet the council found time for a flag ceremony.

Fusion Lifestyle have a history of council contracts being acrimoniously terminated after poor service delivery. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] Town Councils have all had bad experiences. I'm surprised that OTC have not contacted their counterparts to discuss.

Fusion staff are dedicated but whilst membership numbers have increased considerably staff numbers continue to be slashed.

My questions are simply:

- 1. Do you know how bad the service is and that there is no opportunity for disabled users to access anything other than the pool?
- 2. Have you been in contact with other Town Councils who have terminated contracts

with Fusion Lifestyle? Have you even spoken to Tavistock?

3. Why has the Parklands Users Group not met for a year?

4. Why does the User Group not speak to members/users. Surely you should call the group something else - there are no 'users' involved.

I would be happy to join a User Group meeting at the Centre. Of course I'd only be able to accompany you on the ground floor. Wheelchair users have been able to get to the gym or fitness studios since 2023!

**10.3 Allotments - Correspondence received from Okehampton United Charities requesting that the Council assumes responsibility for the day-to-day management of three allotment sites in Okehampton (Fatherford Road, Castle Road and North Street) from September 2026**

Dear Emma,

Thank you for meeting with me yesterday to open informal discussions on the possibility of the Town Council assuming the day-to-day management of the allotments from the Charity.

Please find attached a copy of the present actions undertaken by the charity in the day-to-day management of the three allotment sites (Fatherford Road, Castle Road and North Street). I have also attached a copy of the current allotment agreement for your information. You have copies of previous letters relating to the annual costs of running the allotments over the past five years.

The Trustees of Okehampton United Charities have agreed that managing the three allotment sites is not a current priority and would prefer to allow their staff to focus on its annual grant giving and maintaining other amenity land like Ball Hill and Tramlines and the Almshouses.

Trustees thank OTC for the financial contribution towards managing the allotments and would politely ask councillors to consider taking on the day-to-day management of the three sites from 29<sup>th</sup> September 2026. Trustees need to serve a year's notice to tenants of any changes to their agreements, this would need to be done on or before the 29<sup>th</sup> September 2025.

During our informal discussion yesterday, I observed that the current tenants and individuals on the waiting list are residents of Okehampton and Hamlets. Trustees would like to confirm that these current tenants and those on the waiting list will be allowed to remain until they naturally vacate the site or are removed from the waiting list.

Trustees would like to initiate a discussion with the town council regarding the above proposal and are available to attend a meeting in person at the earliest convenience to begin the discussion.

Kind Regards

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