

Pétanque in Kirklees



It's been a long time coming but it's likely that Kirklees (a metropolitan council area in the northern region of Pétanque England) is the most progressive council in England when it comes to Pétanque. But it's all quite recent.

In 2006 I was a member of Leeds PC and travelling 15 miles to play from my home in Mirfield. The Sunday session was easy but attending the Tuesday evening session meant driving through the Leeds rush hour at peak time and taking 90 minutes to do it.

So I petitioned Mirfield Town Council to consider building a playing area in a park in the middle of town. (Mirfield is a kinda one horse town but the horse is put out to grass).

I attracted the attention of the mayor who had played before and we looked at a site next to the bowls club. I even made page 6 of the Mirfield Reporter (a kinda one horsepower weekly paper) with an arresting feature entitled **Mirfield Man wants boules pitch**. In those days little was known about boules pitches except that they were made of sand and it was compulsory to smoke gitanes and drink Pernod whilst playing.

It didn't come to anything. Social media was in its infancy and mobilising support was hard work. We parked the idea; the mayor's term of office came to an end and I kept on travelling to Leeds.

Then one day I saw a notice in the local media that the council was building an indoor Crown Green facility in Huddersfield and I found out who the lead councillor was and emailed her and started agitating again for pétanque. To my surprise she replied that there were plans to build a playing area in Heckmondwike and gave me contact details of a ward councillor. And so it progressed and in 2010 discussions were eventually underway about Firth Park. The park was being refurbished as a small slice of it had been sold off for a Pharmacy & Health Centre and part of the deal was that money would be made available for more sports facilities in the park. One councillor had suggested quick cricket, tennis courts and a petanque pitch.

I drafted a briefing note for this councillor and had a few meetings in council offices and eventually a plan was devised. Someone had done some research as the plan was for an area 17m by 5m with 6 benches around it so people could sit and watch the game. I suggested it would be better if there were a number of pitches rather than just one and after much grumbling they went away to think about it.

Time passed. Then one day in autumn 2011 I went past the park and saw that a terrain had been built. It was 25m by 9m and this meant that it would fit 6 games on it. Fantastic. What was more impressive was that the pavilion which had suffered from vandalism in the past had been refurbished and was now a secure space that would comfortably hold 50 people and had not one, not two but three toilets and a

kitchen. Within 50 yards was free car park. It was pétanque heaven. (For non pétanque players the most important thing a pétanque club needs are cups of tea, toilets and parking – the pitch is a bonus).

I started running taster sessions on Saturday mornings over autumn and winter and by spring 2012 we had collected contact details of 20 interested people and a meeting was called and a club started.

It grew rapidly. A target of 20 members was achieved in weeks and 40 in a month or two. In the first year the committee decided to stop taking new memberships as there wasn't room on the 6 lane terrain for all the members if they all turned up. Later the club extended the terrain to 8 wide lanes or 10 smaller lanes and membership raced past 60. They hosted regional competitions and everyone who visited was impressed with the facility.



Now Heckmondwike has extended further taking over a disused crown green and now has the largest terrain in the north with over 24 lanes, membership is approaching 100 and they have successfully run La British Open which attracted hundreds of players from all over Europe on a July weekend in 2018 & 2019. Club members have represented the region at national level and they had a regional committee member in 2019. Floodlights were added in 2019. Not bad for a project that councillors wondered might be a white elephant!



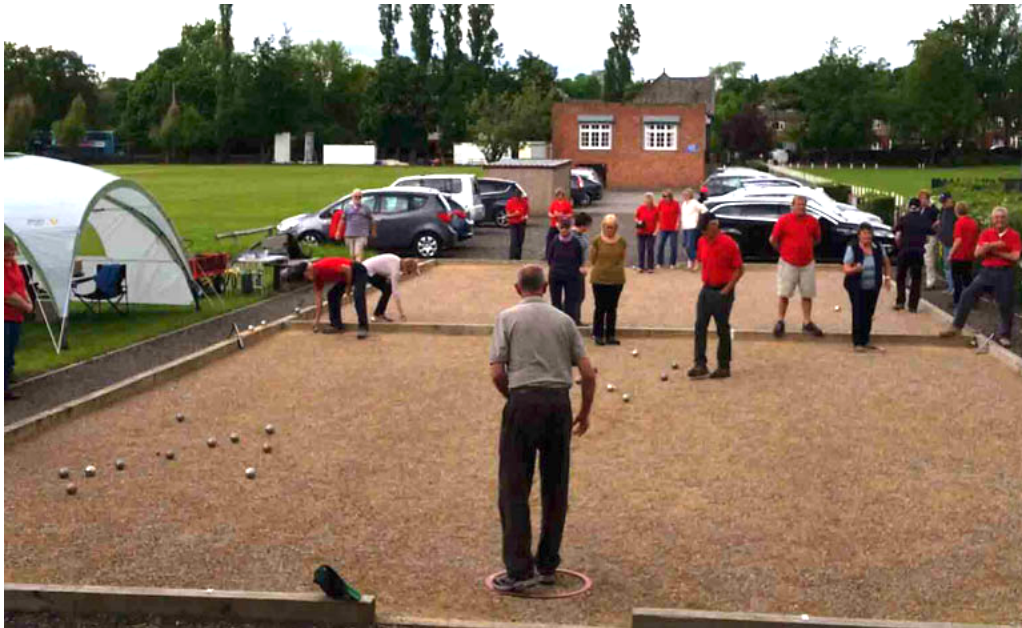
In its second year of operation Heckmondwike was visited by two other councillors from Huddersfield and having seen the success story they decided to replicate it in Greenhead Park in Huddersfield. This suited me as I had moved away from Mirfield. After one success and lots of good experience I recommended a large terrain that would hold 10 three metre lanes and the council provided it. After another autumn and winter of taster sessions Huddersfield Pétanque club held its first AGM at Easter 2014.



Again it soon exceeded all expectations and in 3 years reached 80 members. There was no parking, no pavilion, no tea and toilets were 80m away but over time the club has bought a garden shed to hold playing equipment, created a mediterranean garden to one side, two huge planters on t'other side and has 6 benches for spectators and a noticeboard.



More recently we bought a log cabin style clubhouse that can hold 30 people, levelled the area around the clubhouse for tables and chairs and now has tea and coffee on tap. It too has hosted regional events, had members who have represented the region at national level and provide committee members to the region. In Autumn 2019 it added 5 more pistes to make 15 which makes it one of the largest in the north.



Two years down the line and interested people from Mirfield visited Huddersfield to see if a terrain could be built in their village. Again councillors were involved and following on from the first 2 projects a 6 lane terrain was built next to the cricket club cleverly acquiring parking, toilets and cups of tea. With help from the 2 big clubs it thrived (in fact some Kirklees residents are members of all 3 big clubs now allowing them to play the game 6 days a week) and soon it had 60 members and had to extend to 8 lanes. They often go 'on the road' and travel to distant places to play other pétanque clubs over a weekend.

But it's not all big clubs. There have been several smaller terrains built.

- Honley was one of the first - 2 or 3 lanes and next to the Village Hall. They did manage to attract the 34th highest ranked French player to give a demonstration (and Didier was astounding) of how to play but although it is used regularly there is no formal club.
- Next was Lepton. They are a small community who found some funding and hired a local joiner to build their terrain. One large lane. No club and not well used.
- Kirkburton built a beautiful terrain in a woodland glade near the village centre in 2018. Small but wide and enough room for 3 games. Still developing. May join in a Kirklees village league in 2020.
- Thurstonland is a small village who also built a terrain in 2019. 2 lanes wide and very good looking. Keen to spread their wings but no club as yet. Another for the League.
- The Ukrainian club in Edgerton built one but didn't do enough research and ended up with a short terrain with far too much gravel on it so hasn't had much use.
- In 2020 the large village of Shelley has a 4 lane terrain planned. Funding is in place and should be done this year. They've planned well and should make a go of it. The league beckons.
- Lindley Bowling club thought about a 5 lane terrain in 2018 but decided not to go ahead and there is a rumour that a local member of U3A has a terrain in his back garden. When I'm old enough...