

Skaters rally to save their park

By DI THOMAS

DOZENS of skateboarders rallied in Wodonga's Willow Park at the weekend to demand details of the facility's future.

The protesters want the Wodonga council to provide a detailed timetable for the replacement of the James Scott Memorial Skate Park should the proposed aquatic facility go ahead.

The older ones remember having to wait several years between the closure of the old skate park and the opening of the Willow Park facility.

For many, it meant giving up the sport altogether in the interim.

Craig Quinlivan says that at 32, he's probably the oldest regular at the park and has been riding for about 17 years.

"I used to ride at the old skate park but when it closed, I stopped, for four years in between," he said.

"When the council promises we're going to get a new skate park, it's hard not to be cynical.

"We're not against the pool, but we want a guarantee the skate park is a not-negotiable part of stage one."

Mr Quinlivan said earlier plans had allocated funding for the new skate park, but this was not mentioned in newer plans.

"If you close the skate park, the kids are not going to stop riding," he said.

"It's the old adage: 'if your town doesn't have a skate park, the skate park is your town'."

Ben Nye, 28, is another regular visitor to the skate park, spending five or six hours at the weekend or a couple of days during the week, depending on his work schedule.

"I think the council thinks it's just little kids using the park, but at least three of us own houses and are ratepayers ourselves," he said.

Young skateboarders are also concerned they might have a long wait before their new skate park is open.

"If it took a long time to build it again we would have nowhere to skate while that was happening," Cameron Hall, 14, said.

Jamie Demosani, 13, described the existing park as a "skater's paradise".

Wodonga chief executive Peter Marshall said yesterday the council's initial plans for the aquatic centre had been focused on retaining the existing skate park.

But he said in order to locate the new centre at the eastern-most point to provide more room for parking and future expansion, the council had "bitten the bullet" and made plans to move the skate park.

Mr Marshall said that the skate park users' questions would be addressed at a meeting of councillors today that was reviewing all issues related to the aquatic centre proposal.



● **Protesting the possible removal of the Willow Park skate park were Jamie Demosani, 13, Tom Hood, 14, Will Ratcliffe, 14, and Alex De Koeyer 13. Picture: PETER MERKESTEYN**