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| Subject: | Cavehill Mountain Biking - proposed extension of 'The Middle' to create a feeder trail |
| Date: | 8 th April 2024 |
| Reporting Officer: | Stephen Leonard, Director of Resources, Fleet and OSS |
| Contact Officers: | Eimear McCullough, Lead Officer - OSS |

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| Restricted Reports | |
| Is this report restricted? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted? | |
| After Committee Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| After Council Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Some time in the future | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Never | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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| Call-in | |
| Is the decision eligible for Call-in? | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> |

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| 1.0 | Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues |
| 1.1 | To seek Member approval to a request from Cavehill Mountainbikers Club (CMC) for an extension of 'The Middle' mountain biking trail at Cavehill Country Park via the formalisation of a 'feeder trail' to the site's carpark, and its incorporation into the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Council and CMC to facilitate trail management. |
| 2.0 | Recommendations |
| 2.1 | Members are asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Agree to the request from CMC to a feed trail extension to 'The Middle' mountain bike trail and its incorporation under the existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between BCC and Cavehill Mountainbikers Club (CMC) via addendum. |
| 3.0 | Main report |

Background

- 3.1 Members will recall that at it's February 2024 meeting they received an update on the evaluation of a Cave Hill Mountain Biking Pilot and agreed to a new MOU between BCC and CMC to facilitate the continuation of a partnership approach to the maintenance, management, and inspection of 'The Middle' trail. (see **Appendix 1** for 6th February 2024 P&C Report: Cave Hill Mountain Biking Pilot – update and proposed new MOU).
- 3.2 At that time Members were advised that the new MOU permits officers to explore the viability of including further established trails at Cave Hill Country Park with CMC, and that agreement to formalise any further established trails will be brought back to Committee for consideration following satisfactory review of any trail proposal made by the club, in the context of potential impacts Country Park's natural environment and users.
- 3.3 For Member's information in regard to this – the relevant extract within the MOU reads as follows: *"Should CMC identify any additional trail that they wish to use for mountain biking, they shall present a formal written proposal to BCC setting out the route proposed, and any mitigating measures required having regard to the natural environment of Cave Hill Country Park and its use by the general public. BCC shall act reasonably in considering any proposal, with the final decision on whether to allow mountain biking formally on the trail to be made by BCC having regard to the general public use of Cave Hill Country Park and the natural environment of same. Should consent be given to the use of another trail after satisfactory BCC review and Council approval, then use of that trail shall be incorporated into this MoU and this MoU shall be interpreted as if it includes the additional trail"*
- Current proposal**
- 3.4 In line with the MOU governance arrangements officers and the Club continue to work collaboratively together and formally meet at quarterly operational 'contact' meetings. Through this forum CMC have brought forward a formal proposal to officers to establish a short 'feeder trail' extension to Middle Trail (see **Appendix 2** Location Map of Proposed Feeder Trail). In line with the MOU this is now being presented to Members for consideration.
- 3.5 The proposal involves formalising an unused woodland trail connecting the main path at the end of 'The Middle' trail, through to a gravel path downhill close to site carpark as part of the formal mountain bike trail. The purpose of this feeder trail will be to take mountainbikers exiting 'The Middle' away from the main path and its steps, and as such avoid user conflict on the main path which channels pedestrian traffic from the trailhead to access both the Cavehill Trail (which leads to McArt's Fort), and the Estate Trail. As with the main trail, as a safety measure an additional wooden chicane with associated signage would be installed by at the end of the feeder trail with associated safety signage.
- 3.6 An Environmental assessment for the Middle Trail and route of the proposed extension was carried out by consultants in November 2024 which identified no ecological constraints in relation to the proposed extension to the Middle Trail, provided that no mature trees will be removed. All recommendations set out in the ecological study will be adhered to during path clearance works and monitored by officers, should the extension be agreed. Officers also consulted with the Planning Department who confirmed that planning consent is not required for these works.
- 3.7 Officers have updated key stakeholders including external members of the previous Project Oversight Board (CMC; Belfast Hills Partnership; Cavehill Conservation Trust) and local walker contacts on the proposal.

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| 3.8 | <u>Financial & Resource Implications</u> The cost of the installation of a new safety chicane and design and installation of safely signage will be funded from within existing OSS revenue estimates. |
| 3.9 | <u>Equality or Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessments</u> There are no Equality or Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessments associated with this report. |
| 4.0 | Appendices – Documents Attached |
| | Appendix 1 – 6th February 2024 P&C Report – Cave Hill Mountain Biking Pilot – update and proposed new MOU Appendix 2 – Location map of proposed feeder trail |