



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Mountain Biking at Cave Hill Country Park
Date:	10 April 2008
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Brendan Toland, Park Estates Manager Fintan Grant, Park Manager Horticulture Anne Reid, Countryside Officer

Relevant Background Information

In September 2002 a report was taken to the Parks and Amenities Sub-Committee regarding a Strategic review of Off-Road Cycling In Northern Ireland, copy of minutes attached. At this time the Sub-Committee agreed in principle to the possible development of a dedicated mountain biking facility on Cave Hill and its future management arrangements. Since 2002 a range of different funding sources have been explored and a subsequent report was taken to Special Community & Recreation (Parks and Cemeteries) in January 2006 seeking approval to submit an application to the Sports Lottery Fund and to continue discussions with the various stakeholders.

Following approval from the Parks and Amenities Sub-Committee to investigate funding from the Sports Lottery for a purpose built down-hill mountain biking facility at Cave Hill, officers consulted with Belfast Activity Centre, Countryside Activities Network (CAAN) and local residents through the Cave Hill Conservation Group. There was an overriding feeling, particularly from the Cave Hill residents, that such a facility would attract large numbers of specialised down-hill mountain bikers from a wide area to Cave Hill, as it would be the only facility of its kind in the east of the province. This could lead to over use of the hill and present a danger and nuisance to other users, for example walkers. After discussion it was felt that such a facility would not be popular among residents and walkers on the hill, and was not appropriate for this site. The original proposals are therefore not being pursued.

Key Issues

Mountain Biking is an ever increasing sport within the Belfast area. Currently there are no off road facilities available to enable users to pursue this activity, this has led to the creation of unauthorized trails. These unauthorized trails

have been built on a number of Council sites, namely Cave Hill Country Park, Barnett Demesne and Mary Peters. These trails are currently being removed by Council officers but are quickly being rebuilt; these trails are not sanctioned and are potentially very dangerous.

Talks with some local mountain bikers have taken place, with Officers explaining that they are currently repairing some paths within Cave Hill Country Park and Officers fear that if mountain biking on the site is not managed correctly then the damage caused to these new paths could be substantial.

To try to remove mountain biking from Cave Hill Country Park would be a very costly exercise in terms of man hours and possibly with little success given the nature of the sport.

Officers are requesting permission to continue talks with the local mountain biking representatives and other interested parties to try to accommodate the sport within the Country Park and to explore avenues of funding available. The benefits of such being that we are pro-actively pursuing an outdoor activity, which has huge health benefits to Belfast rate payers, seeking to reduce existing user conflict and making the Country Park a positive visitor attraction. If we do not tackle this problem then the unsanctioned trails will continue to be built in an unregulated manner, leaving huge health and safety implications for the Council, the complaints will continue from members of the public and the damage to other areas of woodland within the Country park could be substantial.

Resource Implications

Financial

Other than staff time there are no specific costs relevant to this matter.

Human Resources

These talks are being carried out by Anne Reid, Fintan Grant, and Brendan Toland.

Asset and Other Implications

None.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Officers be given permission to continue talks with the local mountain biking representatives and to try to accommodate their sport in a manageable way within Cave Hill Country Park, exploring sources of funding, reporting back to the Committee any detailed proposals.

Documents Attached

- Appendix 1: Minutes of Client Services (Parks and Amenities) Sub Committee 10 Sept 2002
- Appendix 2: Minutes of Special Community and Recreation (Parks and Cemeteries) Sub Committee 13 Jan 2006