

## Client Services Committee

Tuesday, 10th September, 2002

### MEETING OF CLIENT SERVICES (PARKS AND AMENITIES) SUB-COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor McClenaghan (Deputy Chairman)  
(in the Chair);  
The High Sheriff (Councillor W. Browne); and  
Councillors D. Browne, Convery, Crozier, Ekin,  
Hartley, McCann, Rodgers, O'Reilly and  
E. Smyth.

In attendance: Mr. M. Elder, Director of Client Services;  
Mr. M. Parkinson, Head of Parks and Amenities;  
Mr. J. Goodall, Committee Administrator; and  
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Administrator.

#### Apology

An apology for inability to attend was reported by the Chairman (Councillor Crooks).

#### Countryside Access and Activities Network – A Strategic Review of Off-Road Cycling in Northern Ireland

The Committee considered a report which had been prepared by the Head of Parks and Amenities in relation to the recommendations contained within the above-mentioned document. A copy of the report is set out hereunder:

#### “Purpose of Report

To appraise the Sub-Committee of the recommendations of the document ‘CAAN – A Strategic Review of Off Road Cycling in Northern Ireland’ and agree in principle to the establishment of mountain biking facilities at the Cavehill Country Park.

#### Background

At present opportunities from the public to participate in ‘off-road’ cycling within Northern Ireland are limited. A lack of dedicated routes and facilities is compounded by limited available information on where the public can take part in ‘off-road’ cycling. Against this background, an estimated 50,000 new mountain bikes are sold per year in Northern Ireland.

In recognition of the lack of facilities and the considerable economic impact generated by the development of 'off road' cycling facilities elsewhere, the Countryside Access and Activities Network (CAAN) undertook a strategic review of 'off road' cycling in Northern Ireland.

The document addresses the current position of 'off-road' cycling in Northern Ireland, provides a review of the current and potential markets, identifies case studies of sites and marketing approaches in Northern Ireland and elsewhere and makes proposals for the way forward in developing further 'off-road' facilities.

The report adopts the following statement as the vision for 'off-road' cycling in Northern Ireland:

'Attractive rural areas in which both visitors and local people can actively enjoy and explore networks of routes on cycles, away from roads, and where there are specialist facilities for those who participate in more adventurous 'off-road' cycling.'

To help achieve this vision the report recommends the development of a series of 'off-road' routes. These include fifteen family cycling routes, seven cross country single-track mountain biking routes and four managed venues for downhill mountain biking.

The Cavehill Country Park has been recommended as one of the four proposed venues for managed downhill mountain biking. This proposal is set against an increasing level of unofficial use of the park by mountain bikers where a number of unofficial routes have been created in the park. The pattern of use is of concern for a number of reasons; (i) mountain bikes can exacerbate erosion of the existing path network, particularly in vulnerable areas, which receive a high level of use. (ii) potential conflict and safety issues between mountain bikers and other park users.

The further development of unofficial routes, if allowed to continue will fragment and damage fragile habitat in the park.

### Proposal

This proposal seeks to establish a partnership between the City Council, CAAN and the local mountain biking community, which will help manage mountain biking on Cavehill. CAAN has submitted funding applications to several potential funders including the Peace and Reconciliation Fund. If the bid is successful, construction costs for the route will be paid from the

project development fund at no cost of the Council. It is anticipated that a suitable route can be agreed with Council staff in order to avoid or minimise disruption to other park users by mountain bikers. A specialist consultant will be appointed to develop the route in conjunction with local mountain bikers. They will in turn undertake to manage the route, in consultation with Council staff, ensuring users have adequate liability cover, protective clothing and adhere to an agreed Code of Conduct, including policing of mountain biking in other areas of the park. The project will also develop promotional materials and a Code of Conduct for Mountain Bikers.

#### **Environmental Implications**

The project should encourage the use of bicycles which is a very sustainable form of transport.

#### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Sub-Committee agrees in principle to the possible development of dedicated mountain biking facilities on Cavehill and their future management arrangements. A report outlining funding and detailed proposals will be submitted to a future meeting.”

The Sub-Committee adopted the recommendation.

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