



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Mountain Biking
Date:	14 May 2009
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Eugene Trainor, Park Manager Anne Reid, Countryside Officer

Relevant Background Information

The Committee may be aware that there is a history of the construction of unauthorised mountain bike jumps and trails in a number of our parks. This has been an ongoing issue in recent years owing to the increasing growth of the sport. To date the Council's response has been to remove these unauthorised structures on health and safety grounds and make those involved in mountain biking aware of the issues.

A number of reports have been taken to Committee on the matter in the past, the most recent in April 2008. On that occasion the report outlined planned work to the path infrastructure at Cave Hill Country Park (CHCP) and highlighted the problem of mountain biking on the site. In the report officers outlined the intended approach to the management of the issue and we are pleased to report that discussions with the mountain bikers have resulted in a significant reduction in the unauthorised use of the park.

In addition to using the Cavehill Country Park, mountain bikers also use the grounds around Mary Peters, Barnett's Demesne and Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park to construct unauthorised jumps and trails.

Key Issues

The key issue for the Committee is how the Council will address the matter. There are a number of points to consider:

1. Mountain biking is an increasingly popular sport within the Belfast area and is now an Olympic Sport, for example there is a proposal to hold a mountain biking event in May which will attract up to 100 competitors from under 10 years upwards and officers are working with the organisers to support the event.

2. Currently there is no off road provision to enable users to pursue this activity, this undoubtedly has contributed to the unauthorised structures referred to above.
3. Unauthorised jumps and trails may present a health and safety hazard to both users and to members of the public visiting the park, and for that reason the Council needs to take appropriate action. The removal of these structures is time consuming and will have a cost impact in terms of staff time and use of equipment;
4. Officers have engaged with individual mountain bikers and the Belfast Urban Sports body to highlight the Council's position on the matter, there is a willingness and desire on the part of the mountain bikers to work with the Council to meet the demands and needs of the sport and to ensure that the trails are acceptable to the Council;

In conclusion, there is a need to work to address the gap in provision and ensure that any jumps and trails are authorised and meet the necessary health and safety requirements. There are positive benefits to be accrued by addressing this issue:

- The Council will address a gap in leisure and sporting provision;
- It will support a growing sport and activity in the City;
- It will support a healthier life style;
- It will mitigate against the construction of unauthorised trails and associated health and safety issues.

It is therefore proposed that officers are authorised to explore the possibility of constructing a trail system within land at the Mary Peters/Barnett Demesne locality concentrating initially on establishing a jump and skills area to meet local need. The Committee is asked to note that the consents of the principal landowners may be required and will be sought as necessary as part of the process.

Resource Implications

Financial

There are no financial implications at this time. These implications will be considered as part of the discussions.

Human Resources

There are no additional human resource implications other than staff time.

Asset and Other Implications

This would enhance provision in the city and would support the promotion of the park.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Committee note the contents of the report and:

- agree that officers further explore the option of creating a trail system at Mary Peters/Barnett Demesne, concentrating firstly on creating a jump and skills area to meet local need and prevent more unsanctioned jumps being built; and
- agree to receive a further report later in the year detailing proposals together with appropriate costs and clarification regarding estates based issues.

Decision Tracking

Further report to Committee in September 2009 – Principal Parks and Cemeteries Services Manager.

Key to Abbreviations

CHCP – Cave Hill Country Park

Documents Attached

None.

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