



Subject:	Mountain Biking Cave Hill
Date:	6 February 2018
Reporting Officer:	Nigel Grimshaw, Director of City and Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Rose Crozier, Assistant Director Fintan Grant, City Parks Manager

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"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To inform members of current issues and proposals to manage mountain biking on Cave Hill.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	It is recommended that council approve the course of action outlined below to stop mountain biking at Cavehill Country Park.

3.0	Main Report
	<u>Background</u>
3.1	<p>Mountain biking has been an on-going issue in Cavehill Country Park (CHCP) for a number of decades. Officers have made several attempts to find solutions, through a number of initiatives, to try to reduce the conflict between mountain bikers and other park users.</p>
3.2	<p>As a background, the following is a timeline of reports taken to different committees over the past 15 years. This provides an insight into the issues involved and measures that have been taken to address the problems encountered up to this point.</p> <p>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. At this time the Sub-Committee agreed in principle to the possible development of a dedicated mountain biking facility on Cave Hill.</p>
3.3	<p>A subsequent report was taken to Special Community & Recreation (Parks and Cemeteries) in January 2006 to continue discussions with the various stakeholders. Following approval, officers carried out a consultation exercise the outcome of which was that such a facility would not be popular among residents and walkers on the hill, and was not appropriate for this site. The original proposal was therefore not pursued.</p>
3.4	<p>In 2008 following the building of unauthorised and in some cases dangerous biking trails and jumps, at CHCP, and their subsequent removal by staff a report was taken to committee which 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 CHCP exploring sources of funding, reporting back to the Committee on any detailed proposals.</p>
3.5	<p>Following this decision of the Committee, in August 2008 a report was commissioned from a professional off-road cycling trail designer, Dafydd Davis.</p>
3.6	<p>Following site visits, it was concluded that the existing path system at Cave Hill could not accommodate sustainable dual use for both mountain bikers and pedestrians and that conflict between users would be a continuing problem. It was recommended in the report that Mary Peters Track/Barnett Demesne would be a more suitable option for a purpose built off-road biking facility.</p>

3.7	<p>A further report on mountain biking was again brought to the Committee's attention on 14 May 2009. This report agreed that officers should further explore the option of creating a purpose built biking trail. It was agreed that the preferred location would be at Mary Peters Track/Barnett Demesne. The facility would include a jump and skills area that would meet local need and reduce the amount of unsanctioned jumps being built, both in the South and the North of the city. The report also highlighted that Cave Hill Country Park is a very important recreation resource for the people of the city of Belfast, but it is also clear that mountain bikers are having significant impacts on the site and the people who use it and that this is to some extent devaluing the site for the majority of users.</p>
3.8	<p>Due to the potential risk to the public from the bikers and upon receipt of numerous complaints, officers have sought to engage continually with the bikers, looking for an accommodation that would be to everyone's benefit. Signs displaying the current bye-laws were displayed at all entrances. Park rangers have tried to be on site as often as possible, but due to having to deal with issues across North Belfast this resource was stretched. Meanwhile it was noted that the bikers have taken ownership of the hill.</p>
3.9	<p>In a further report taken in April 2010 it was recommended that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Committee agree in principle to support an application by CAAN, to be funded by the Rural Development Programme, to develop a mountain biking facility at Barnett's Demesne/Mary Peters • Authorise officers to continue to work in partnership with CAAN; • Support the forwarding of the proposal to the Asset Management Group for inclusion on the list of potential capital schemes, subject to Gates; • Agree to deploying extra resources to enforce the bye-laws at CHCP.
3.10	<p>This would include employing Park Rangers at the weekends and summer evenings.</p>
3.11	<p>The new facility at Barnett Demesne was opened on 26th April 2013 and it was hoped at this stage that it would very significantly alleviate some of the pressure on Cave Hill.</p>
3.12	<p>Since 2013, however, a group of downhill mountain bikers have continued to use Cavehill as they feel their downhill needs are not being met on the cross-country trail at Barnett Demesne. Their presence remained relatively under the radar for a number of</p>

	<p>years and didn't come to the attention of management until allegations emerged in 2015 that some of the unsanctioned trails were being sabotaged. This was in the form of branches being placed strategically across trails and holes being dug to make things difficult for the bikers. This activity however had the potential to cause serious injury to park users if an accident was to occur. Officers and staff continued to check the area on a weekly basis and remove any obstacles that they became aware of.</p>
3.12	<p>In June 2017, 2 representatives from the mountain biking community which regularly cycle at CHCP made Council Officers aware of video footage of individuals sabotaging the unsanctioned mountain bike trails. This footage was also presented to the PSNI who carried out an investigation into the matter.</p>
3.13	<p>Key Issues</p> <p>Management have continued in their efforts to uphold the byelaw in relation to mountain biking in the park which states:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>A person shall not ride any bicycle in a manner which is unsafe or likely to cause damage to the park or give reasonable cause for annoyance or alarm to other persons in the park.</i></p>
3.14	<p>Management measures include erecting signage at all the entrances into the park in relation to bye-laws, staff checking trails on a weekly basis and recording issues and stepping up enforcement patrols by Park Wardens who have recently been enabled to enforce this particular bye-law.</p>
3.15	<p>After 15 years of trying to find an accommodation that meets the needs of all users, it is now clear that Council must take measures to prevent mountain biking at CHCP. The dangerous nature of this activity on this site has been highlighted as a serious public safety issue and would draw Members attention to two recent, high profile incidents involving the death of a walker in Colin Glen Forest Park in a collision with a scrambler and also the death of a pedestrian knocked down by a cyclist in London.</p>
3.16	<p>During the recent PSNI investigation into the alleged sabotage of biking trails, it was disclosed that riders can reach speeds of up to 30 mph. The investigating Police Officer, who visited the park, is of the view that these speeds, coupled with the fact that the underfoot conditions in some forested areas are particularly treacherous, increase the risk to bikers and also to walkers. Please also bear in mind that CHCP is a popular</p>

	<p>spot for dog walking, many of which are not on a lead. The Police officer's views in this regard are fully shared by Management and BCC Legal Services.</p>
3.17	<p>Management have also been provided with a PSNI email trail, which includes an email to a Chief Inspector which states that "As it stands there is a clear risk and unacceptable risk" and concludes that "the status quo is no longer a safe or viable option".</p>
3.18	<p>A suggestion that an area of the park could be segregated for the sole or part-time use by mountain bikers is not feasible. Council would then be seen to be actively encouraging mountain bikers into the park and therefore would be responsible for the safety of mountain bikers and the consequences of any subsequent conflicts between users.</p>
3.19	<p>In terms of enforcement, management would seek to take a similar approach to the successful action/programme taken by the Council, in conjunction with the PSNI, in combatting the scrambling issue in Council parks.</p>
3.20	<p>If approval is granted, we aim to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set up an in-house management team to oversee the project - Engage with mountain bikers & relevant stakeholders and park users to inform them of the process and rationale for the measures we are taking. - Plan an initial high profile enforcement blitz at the site in conjunction with the PSNI. - Prepare a communications plan to ensure that the message is publicised. - Prepare a sustainable enforcement plan to ensure that the bye-laws are being adhered to.
3.21	<p>Officers are seeking permission to engage with mountain bikers and park users to inform them of the measures, as set out above, to try to stop mountain biking within CHCP.</p>
3.22	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There costs associated with this will be met within existing resources</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p>

3.23	None
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None