

# DEVELOPING MOUNTAIN BIKING WITHIN CATHKIN BRAES COUNTRY PARK

## SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSALS

### **Background**

Cathkin Braes Country Park was included in the 2014 Commonwealth Games bid document as the proposed venue for the mountain biking competitions. The country park provides an ideal backdrop for an important event like this with its stunning views over the city and excellent mix of terrain, such as open moorland, wooded areas and challenging climbs and descents. The country park is also located within easy reach of a population of 1.8 million people.

On 9 November 2007, Glasgow was confirmed as the successful candidate city for the 2014 Games. A preferred alignment for the 2014 course has now been identified and it is proposed to build a permanent mountain biking facility, based on this alignment, as a legacy of the Commonwealth Games. Although Scotland is a world leader regarding the provision of mountain biking facilities, few venues are located within or near to built-up areas, hence access to the sport can sometimes be difficult for people whose travel options are limited. The provision of a facility within Cathkin Braes Country Park therefore enables access to the sport for all Glaswegians and residents of neighbouring areas, benefiting local communities, as well as elite sportspeople.

### **Aims**

The main aims of the project are to:

- provide a mountain bike course suitable for Glasgow 2014;
- construct graded mountain bike circuits based on the 2014 course, which will be available as a permanent facility;
- permit test events to take place so that proposals can be fine tuned;
- improve access arrangements to and through the country park for all users; and
- enhance personal security for all park users by encouraging greater legitimate use of the country park.

### **Purpose of the consultation**

Opportunities exist to improve the proposals. For example, the Council would like to ensure that the country park is looking its best for 2014, so please feel free to submit any suggestions regarding work which could be undertaken as part of the 2014 preparations which you think would enhance your enjoyment of the country park. Also, should you have any concerns regarding the implementation of the mountain bike course, then please let us know, so that action can be taken where necessary. For example, you may have views on the layout of the course.

Finally, if you believe your skills would be of use and would like to volunteer to help, either with conservation work in the park, or with the 2014 event itself, then again please let us know and we will try to involve you.

### **The 2014 Commonwealth Games Course**

Concepts for the course were initially explored with the help of Scottish Cycling, who are the national governing body for cycle sport in Scotland. Early amendments have been made to some of the initial suggestions as a result of expert advice regarding biodiversity and conservation. This has meant that the proposals are not located in areas of the park where there are particular sensitivities regarding nature. Since November 2007 (2014 Games award announcement), work has progressed on the feasibility of a preferred course and Scottish Cycling have carried out a best value audit, comparing the course against two other potential venues. The Glasgow 2014 Organising Committee and Glasgow City Council now intend to work with Scottish Cycling, British Cycling and the Union Cycliste Internationale to ensure compliance with international standards.

The course proposed is approximately 8 kilometres long, with the highest location on the circuit sitting at approximately 200 metres above sea level. Although the lowest point is only about 130 metres above sea level, over 280 metres of climbing are encountered per lap, since the course is undulating throughout. The path network, which will be developed for the legacy routes, forms the backbone of the 2014 course. The proposed start/finish area for the 2014 event is located next to the car park on Cathkin Road and a one kilometre starting loop will be undertaken prior to continuing round the 8 kilometre circuit. Whilst most of the support facilities will be located at this area for the duration of the events, most spectators are expected to wander to key vantage points throughout the course whilst the events are in progress.

## **The legacy routes**

### **General**

Views are requested regarding the layout of the mountain bike course. Options include:

1. Developing trails which are completely segregated from the existing network of formal and informal paths;
2. Upgrading existing paths to enable multiple use;
3. Identifying where new paths are needed, but allowing selected paths to be shared by everyone.

The legacy from the Games will comprise of four permanent circuits, graded according to skill level and intensity:

Green Route – Easy  
Blue Route – Moderate  
Red Route – Hard  
Black Route – Severe

The grading system will result in the width of the trails varying, as will the gradient and surface treatment, according to the severity of the grading. Further details on each circuit are given below:

### **Green Route**

This is the easiest of all four circuits and is 1 kilometre long. The trail width will be a minimum of one metre and generally wide enough for a parent and child to cycle side by side. The surface will be firm and stable with an average gradient of 5% or less, with natural obstacles no larger than 50mm. This route will be ideal for families and novice cyclists.

### **Blue Route**

Slightly harder than the green route, the blue route will introduce more challenges and is slightly longer at 1.8 kilometres. Graded 'Moderate', the blue route is located around the open moorland to the south of the country park and in the southern edge of Big Wood. Part of the blue circuit also makes use of the green circuit for a short distance. The trail width will be in excess of 600mm and generally firm and stable, with an average gradient of 10% or less. Natural obstacles will be 225mm or less with bypasses when required. Unavoidable trail features such as rocks or steps will be 50mm high or less. This circuit will be ideal for those who have mastered the basics of mountain biking and are now looking to develop their skills a little further.

### Red Route

The red circuit is the 'difficult' circuit and is aimed at competent mountain bikers who expect to have their bike handling skills and their physical fitness challenged. The circuit is approximately 4 kilometres long and located to the east of the country park, using as much of the height difference as possible to provide the physical challenge. The trail width will be approximately 600mm or less with a widely variable surface condition and an average gradient of 15% or less. Natural obstacles will be 375mm or less with bypasses when required. Loose material may be present. It is likely that there will be unavoidable bridges which will be at least 600mm wide, rocky terrain, steep climbs and descents. Choosing the right line through this difficult terrain will be required, emphasising the need for agility.

### Black Route

This is the most difficult circuit for cyclists, graded 'severe'. The highest level of skills will be required to complete this course which will be about 1.2 kilometres long. Located towards the north west of the country park, the route uses the level difference to best advantage, as well as the natural terrain. The trail width may be as narrow as 150mm and will be widely variable and unpredictable. The average gradient will be 20% or less and natural obstacles of 375mm or more, with bypasses, can be expected. Loose material may be present and the course will challenge even competent cyclists.

### **Test Events**

It is proposed to run test event events within the country park to investigate how the park performs as a venue for cycling events. Not only will the logistics and impact on the local community be considered, but valuable information regarding the course will be obtained, which will feed into the design of the 2014 course and legacy circuits.

The first test event is planned for 9 August 2009 and will be loosely based on the proposed 2014 course. The event will predominately use the existing terrain. Exploratory works are being carried out at present for this event and comprise mainly of cutting some of the long grass to establish an obvious route. This will be done at regular intervals so as to establish the corridor, including the removal of overgrown shrubbery and removal of eye level branches which protrude over paths. Localised path improvements on soft ground will be carried out, such as drainage works at paths which are prone to flooding, and will benefit all existing park users. Small culverts or footbridges will be installed at streams where crossings are not currently available. The test event will comprise of a race for children who are under 12 years old, a youth category race, a women & masters category race and an elite level race.

## **Protection of plants and animals**

Protecting the habitat of the country park is extremely important hence the Council is keen to ensure this, and in addition, seize any opportunities to actively improve biodiversity. The country park benefits from having the status of 'Site of Importance for Nature Conservation' and this area extends from Blairbeth Golf Course in the east to Windlaw Farm in the west. Since the whole of the proposed mountain biking course is contained within this area, special consideration will be given to the implications of any proposed works. Glasgow's Local Biodiversity Action Plan recognises the importance of species such as the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (butterfly), Skylark and Reed Bunting and plant species such as Burnet-saxifrage, all of which can be found within the country park. The Braes incorporates a wide range of local habitats including marsh, scrub, grassland, hedgerows and woodlands. This natural woodland is a significant skyline feature of Glasgow and its suburbs.

For the above reasons, amendments have already been made to some of the initial concepts regarding course routing to ensure that no conflict with biodiversity exists. This was done following expert advice regarding biodiversity and conservation and it is acknowledged that implementation of the mountain bike facility offers an opportunity to make further improvements. For example, increased cutting and lifting of grass is aimed at establishing wild flower meadows. Trimming of shrubbery and improved drainage will help to ensure that paths are kept in an accessible condition, encouraging people to stay clear of sensitive areas. In summary, by 2014, it is hoped that the country park will look the best it has ever looked and enjoyed by many more people than it is at present, with some of the best examples of nature conservation within the city.

## **Other activities within the country park**

The Council is expected to manage all land use requirements in a responsible manner, thereby helping to avoid conflict between different user groups. The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 establishes a statutory right of responsible access to land for outdoor recreation. All park users are therefore encouraged to adhere to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. The three key principles for responsible access apply to both the public and land managers:

- Respect the interests of other people: Be considerate, respect privacy and livelihoods and the needs of those enjoying the outdoors.
- Care for the environment: Look after the places you visit and enjoy. Care for wildlife and historic sites.
- Take responsibility for your own actions: The outdoors cannot be made risk-free for people exercising access rights; land managers should act with care for people's safety.

In keeping with the above, the Council will continue to manage access requirements, for example, by promoting the park management rules, educating users regarding responsibilities, promoting good practice, explaining the sensitivities of the local environment and by way-marking or the erection of appropriate signage.

It is also proposed to improve sustainable transport links to and through the country park. By developing good walking and cycling routes, it is hoped that many people will choose to visit the country park, whilst leaving their cars at home, thus extending the benefit of a healthy and active day out.

### **Links with other projects**

#### Mitchellhill

The Mitchellhill flats in Castlemilk were demolished in 2005. Recently, a study group commissioned an independent feasibility study for development of the site. The study took place between January and March 2008 and was launched on 27 November 2008. One of the main recommendations is the development of an activity and visitor centre. Further work is required to assess the potential of this suggestion, but if built, it would be considered as the main base for mountain biking activities within Cathkin Braes Country Park. Connecting trails will be required to the existing proposals.

#### Wind Park

Castlemilk Wind Park Trust is advancing their proposal to erect a wind turbine and a meteorological mast within the country park. Care is being taken to ensure that there is no conflict between the development of mountain biking trails and the locating of the turbine and the meteorological mast.

### **Links to the community**

If you are part of a community group and you think that you are likely to use the mountain bike trails then the Council would like to hear from you, especially if you have special needs which you would like to be considered. Also, if you wish to volunteer and become part of this project then please let us know as well. Opportunities exist to become involved with local events, nature or conservation projects, or the Commonwealth Games. Please contact the consultation address or refer to the websites below:

- Volunteer opportunities with the Countryside Ranger Service  
[http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/en/Residents/Parks\\_Outdoors/CountrysideRangers/Clubs/volunteeropportunitieswiththecountrysiderangerservice.htm](http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/en/Residents/Parks_Outdoors/CountrysideRangers/Clubs/volunteeropportunitieswiththecountrysiderangerservice.htm)
- Volunteer opportunities regarding the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games:  
<http://www.glasgow2014.com/GetInvolved/Volunteers/>
- Volunteer opportunities regarding keeping Glasgow clean:  
<http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/en/Residents/CleanGlasgow/GetInvolved/>

## **Consultation programme**

The consultation period will run until **6 March 2009**. The consultation is targeting central and local central government organisations; local community councils and community groups; environmental and conservation groups; and sports organisations, especially cycling groups.

**A public exhibition will be held on Thursday 19 February 2009, between 12 noon and 8PM in Castlemilk Community Centre, 121 Castlemilk Drive, Glasgow**, where officers from Glasgow City Council and other relevant agencies will be available to answer any questions personally. Please feel free to drop in and speak to them.

The responses received from the public consultation will then feed into the final design process which will take place during the remainder of 2009.

## **Contact details**

Should you wish to respond to the consultation, please forward your views to;

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