Have Your Say

Proposed Mountain Bike Skills Area and New Tracks – Wither Hills Farm Park

Introduction

A request has been received by the Marlborough District Council (Council) from the Marlborough Mountain Bike Club (MMBC or Club)) who wish to develop a mountain bike skills park and tracks within the forested area in and around the Gentle Annie and Rotary Lookout walking tracks. The skills park would provide an area where riders can practice their skills within a purpose-built facility. A shared walking/biking track would connect the bottom of each of the five separate skills zones while a new cross-country biking only track through the skill zones is also proposed.

Because the proposal is outside of the existing purpose designed Wither Hills Mountain Bike Park and is not within an area where mountain biking normally occurs, the Council considers the public should be consulted on the request. This document provides information on what is proposed, why the MMBC have chosen the proposed location, the current management plan approach to mountain biking and how you can comment on the MMBC proposal.

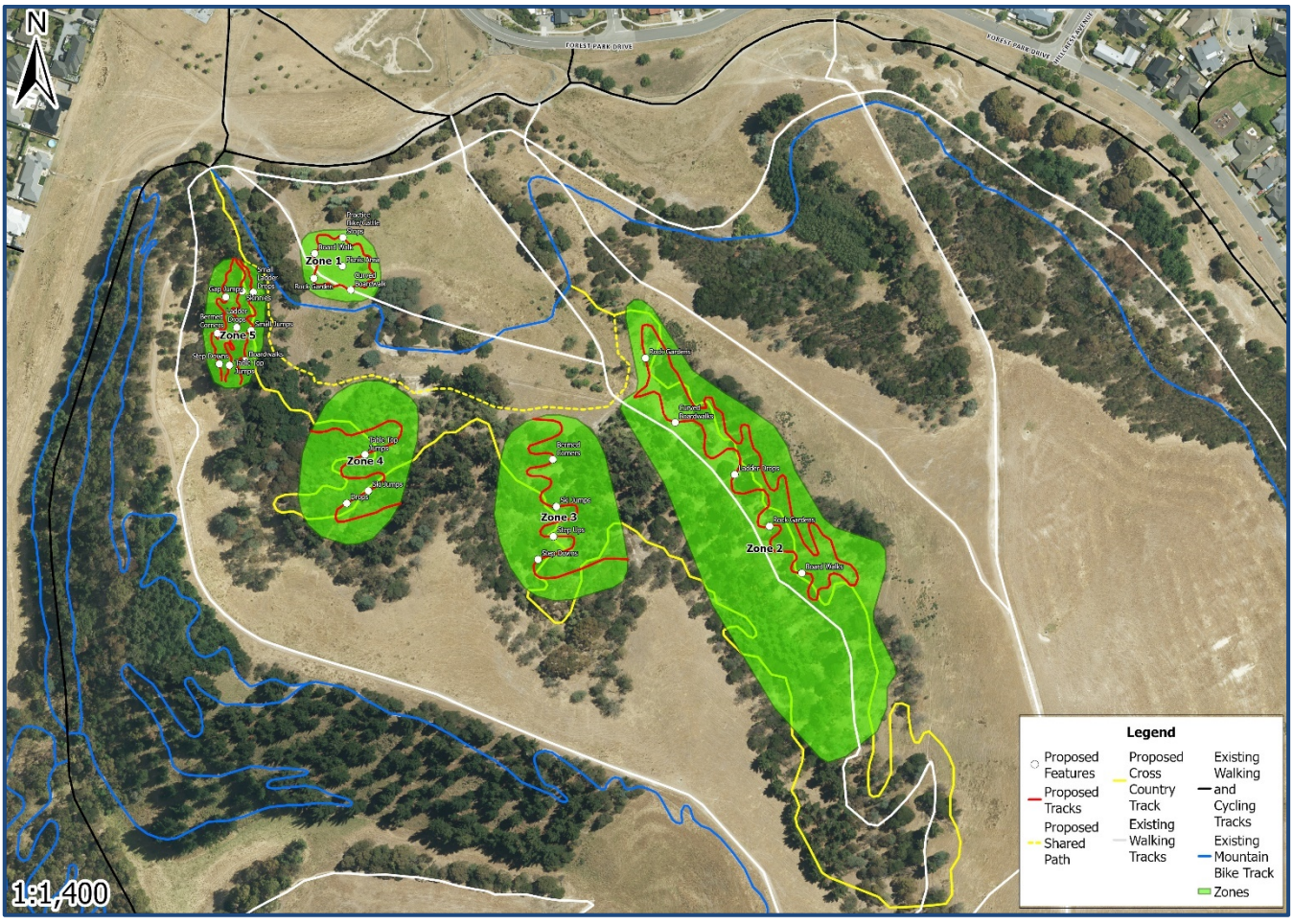
The tree lined gully behind the entrance sign at Rifle Range entrance to the Wither Hills Farm Park is the proposed location for the proposed mountain biking skills area and new tracks.

What is proposed?

A skills park provides a range of features where the skills of mountain biking can be coached and then practiced by all levels of rider. Features at the basic level will include introductory rock gardens and board walks moving through to more technical zones with bermed corners, ladder drops, ski jumps etc.

The immediate plan is to develop the tracks and some skills features for the upcoming New Zealand Schools National Mountain Bike Championship in October 2023. The skills areas will be completed after the 2023 event and are then proposed to be used by the MMBC for regional and national events on a regular basis going forward. If approval is given to establish these features, they would become permanent features for use in the Gentle Annie and Rotary Lookout area.

The MMBC proposal contains five separate skills zones (and new tracks) that can be seen in the aerial photo below. The cross-country track will cross the Gentle Annie Track at one location (higher on the track) while the shared path will cross and merge with other tracks at the lower level.



A fuller description of what is proposed for each of the skills area and the new tracks (including an aerial map) can be found in Appendix 1 – this information is taken from the MMBC original request submitted to the Council.

Why this location?

The proposed skills park and new tracks would be located outside of the Wither Hills Mountain Bike Park boundary and within the wooded area in and around the Gentle Annie and Rotary Lookout tracks. Within this area mountain biking is not provided for as a permitted activity in the Wither Hills Farm Park Management Plan (Plan) while in the Mountain Bike Park it is a permitted activity.

The MMBC reasons for wanting to use the proposed area for mountain biking are as follows:

- The Club acknowledges the Mountain Bike Park is a fantastic facility and a great asset for local riders but believes currently there is a lack of a 'front of house' location where regional and national events can be hosted and where the public can easily access the race area. With the Rifle Range car park and toilets and overflow parking available nearby, the proposed area is considered by the Club to be an ideal 'front of house' location.
- The proposed area is more suited to developing a skills area than the Mountain Bike Park. It offers a greater range of slope types to develop bike riding skills and being predominantly within a wooded area there would be more protection from the weather for the skills features and tracks.
- During summer many areas of the Wither Hills are closed to the public because of the fire risk, including mountain bike tracks. The proposed skills park and new tracks being in the lower Farm Park, is in an area where trails remain open for much of the summer. The Club's view is that having some trails and a skills area open for mountain biking during periods of fire risk, allows both casual users to continue to ride and for the Club to schedule and plan for events year-round.

Why are we consulting?

The Council is consulting the public on the MMBC request because the area proposed for the permanent mountain bike trails and skills area has predominantly been enjoyed and experienced as a walking area. While there is a mountain bike trail around the base of the hill at this location, the other tracks in this area and leading up to the Rotary Shelter, are walking only tracks.

Gentle Annie Track – proposed Skills Zone 2 to be developed on slope to left of the track

The Wither Hills Farm Park Management Plan (Plan) also promotes public consultation[1] on any significant developments and/or changes in policy. The proposal to add mountain biking into a predominantly walking area is both a significant development and change in policy approach given the Plan does not for provide for mountain biking as a permitted activity in the area proposed for development.

The MMBC is a strong advocate for mountain bikers who use the mountain bike tracks on the Wither Hills and the Council is aware of support for the proposed development from that community. The MMBC do acknowledge the importance of this area for walkers but consider the two activities can coexist with little impact on walkers.

It is important however, that the Council also hears from others who may not be mountain bikers. Knowing how walkers may use this part of the Farm Park, how often and whether their walking experience would be affected with mountain biking activities based nearby permanently, is necessary information for the Council in its decision making about the MMBC proposal.

What we would like to know is:

- Are you a mountain biker, walker or both?
- How often you use the walking tracks around the Gentle Annie and Rotary Track areas?
- Would you use a skills area and tracks if developed in the area proposed or in another area? If so, where?
- If you are a walker who uses this area, would mountain bikers based here detract from your enjoyment of the area for walking?
- The proposed mountain bike track will cross the Gentle Annie Track at certain points – would this affect your use of the walking track?
- Do you have any other concerns with the use of the proposed area for mountain biking activities?

Your opportunity to comment

Feedback will be received by the Council until the 11th of November 2022.

You are able to lodge an online submission through www.marlborough.govt.nz/your-council/have-your-say-consultations or by email to witherhills.planreview@marlborough.govt.nz. Hard copy submission forms are also available from the Council's offices or at the main entrances to the Farm Park.

Once the feedback has been reviewed a report will be prepared for the Council to help in its decision making on whether the mountain bike skills area and tracks will be allowed in the area proposed and whether this will be a permanent change. Other expert information about developing more tracks in this area will also help inform the Council's decision making.

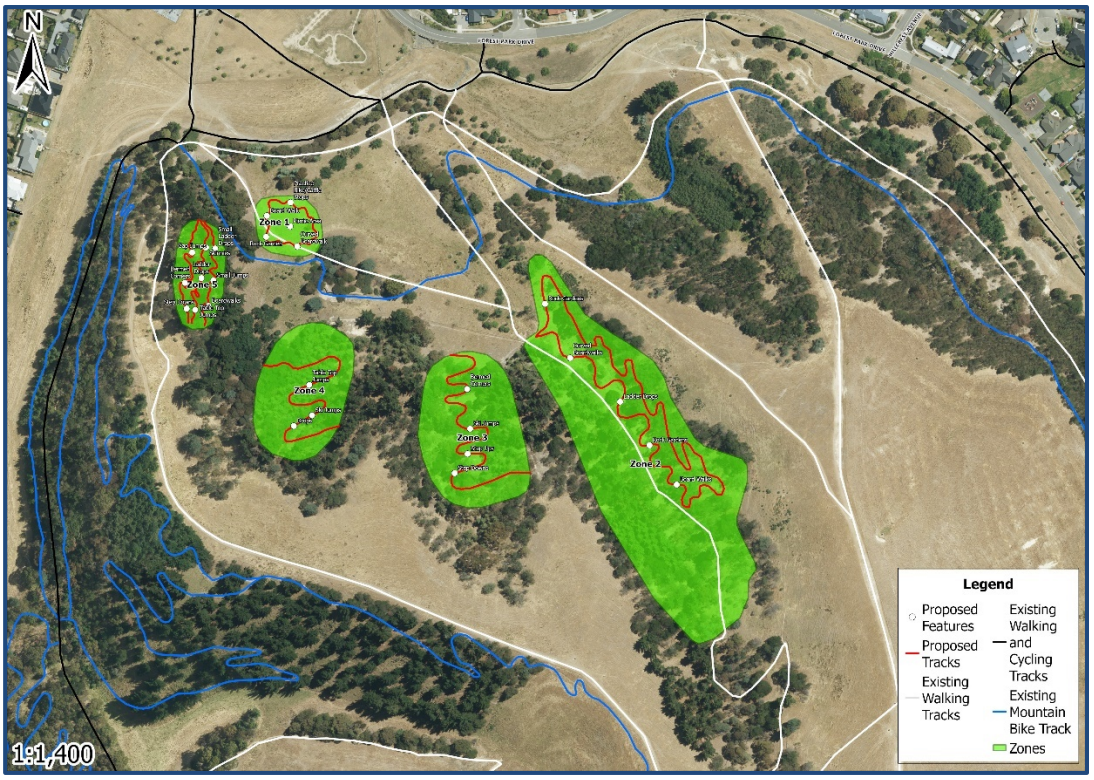
If you would like to talk with someone about this proposal please contact Jane Tito at the Council on 5207400 or jane.tito@marlborough.govt.nz .

[1] Consultation on a review of the whole Plan is about to commence and proposals such as this would normally be considered through that process. However, the Council decided to initiate consultation earlier on this specific request from the MMBC with the Club hosting the National Secondary Schools Cross Country Mountain Biking Championship in October 2023.

Appendix 1

Location of skill zones

The first aerial below shows the location of each of the skills zones in relation to the existing tracks in the area and the Rifle Range carpark. The second aerial shows the tracks proposed in each of the zones.



Skills Zone 1 – Flat Land Skills Zone

Zone 1 is where riders can get a taste for what they will find in the following four skills zones.

This is where parents can introduce children to basic mountain biking skills and also for any coaching clinics to form a base from.

The ‘track’ will include very basic rock gardens, board walks and basic small flat berms.

Skills taught will be body position on the bike and balance.

Skills Zone 2 – Small Feature Trail

Zone 2 will have a 2-way track in the gully. Riders will be able to ride both up and down the trail. Riding both ways will require different skill sets on the same features.

Trail Features

- Board walks
- Rock gardens
- Small ladder drops
- Skinny's (narrow board walks, log rides)

Skills Zone 3 – Jump Progression and Gentle Downhill Trail Cornering

Zone 3 will have one descending trail that will lead down from the head of the basin plus a climbing track back to the head of the trail.

The descending trail will be mostly a single trail but will split into two or three for a short distance where the trail features are located allowing for two or three different sizes and skill levels.

Skills taught

Skills taught on step up, step downs, ski jumps and drops form the basis of 'jumping'. They break down a 'full' table top jump or gap jump into four parts.

- The approach
- The take off
- Bike and body control in the air
- The landing and regaining breaking control

Trail Features

- Step ups - 'the take-off'
- Step downs - 'the landing'
- Ski jumps - 'judging distance and speed control on landing
- Ladder drops – 'speed control and judging speed'
- Berm track – small 30cm high, 5-10m radius, small slope, initiating braking control

Trail specifications

- 1m wide
- Natural drainage
- Stone and rock armouring in drainage areas
- Grade 2 – 3

Skills Zone 4 – Introduction of Speed and Speed Control

Zone 4 will have one trail from the head of the basin. Incorporated into the trail will be features with alternative a, b, c lines. These 'lines' will have three features all the same design, but at three different levels - small, medium and large.

Run in's, landings and run outs will all be identical to ensure familiarity and confidence for the rider, the only change and focus is the size of the feature.

Skills taught

To master a jump the rider must be able to judge their speed, too fast and they may jump too far, too slow and they may not make the landing.

Two critical skills are:

Judging speed. As riders approach a feature, they will need to ensure they have the correct speed to accomplish the feature.

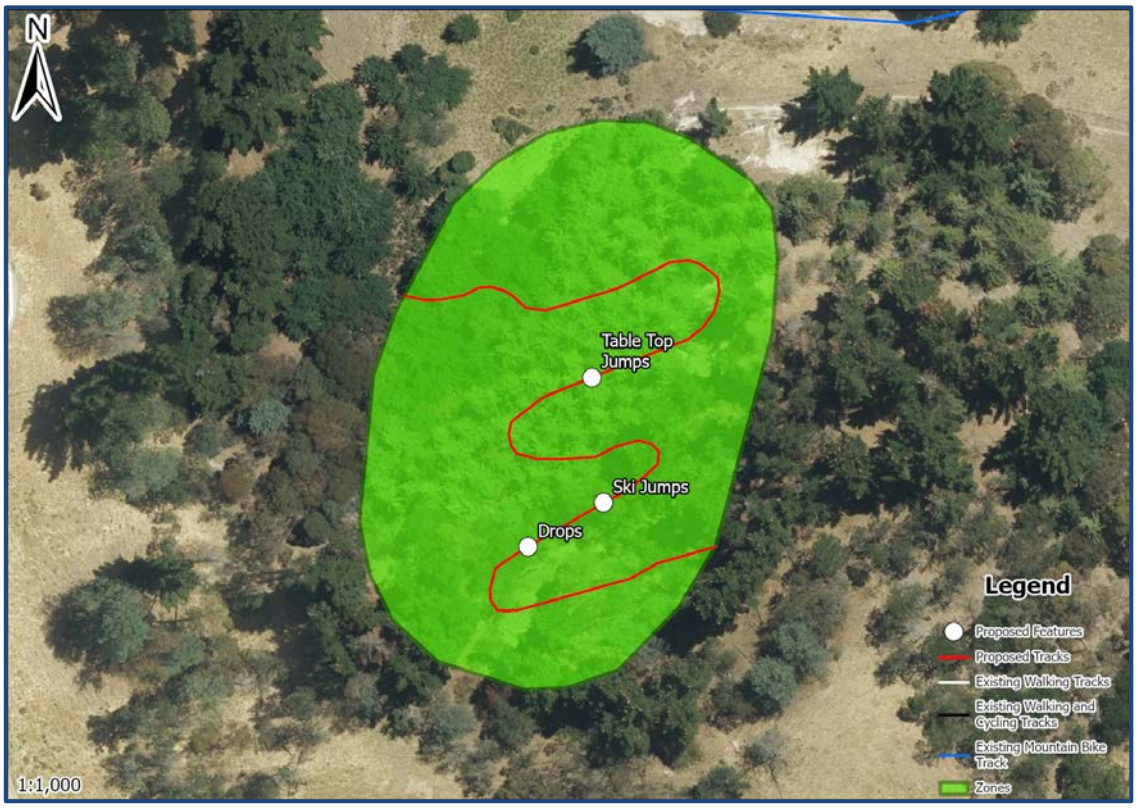
Braking and speed control. Slowing down prior to a trail feature and coming to a controlled stop after a trail feature.

Trail Features

- Each features will progress in size
- Larger ski jumps x3
- Table tops x3
- Gap Jumps x3
- Berms x6 (left and right)

Trail Specifications

- 1m wide
- Natural drainage
- Grade 2



Skills Zone 5 – The Action Zone!

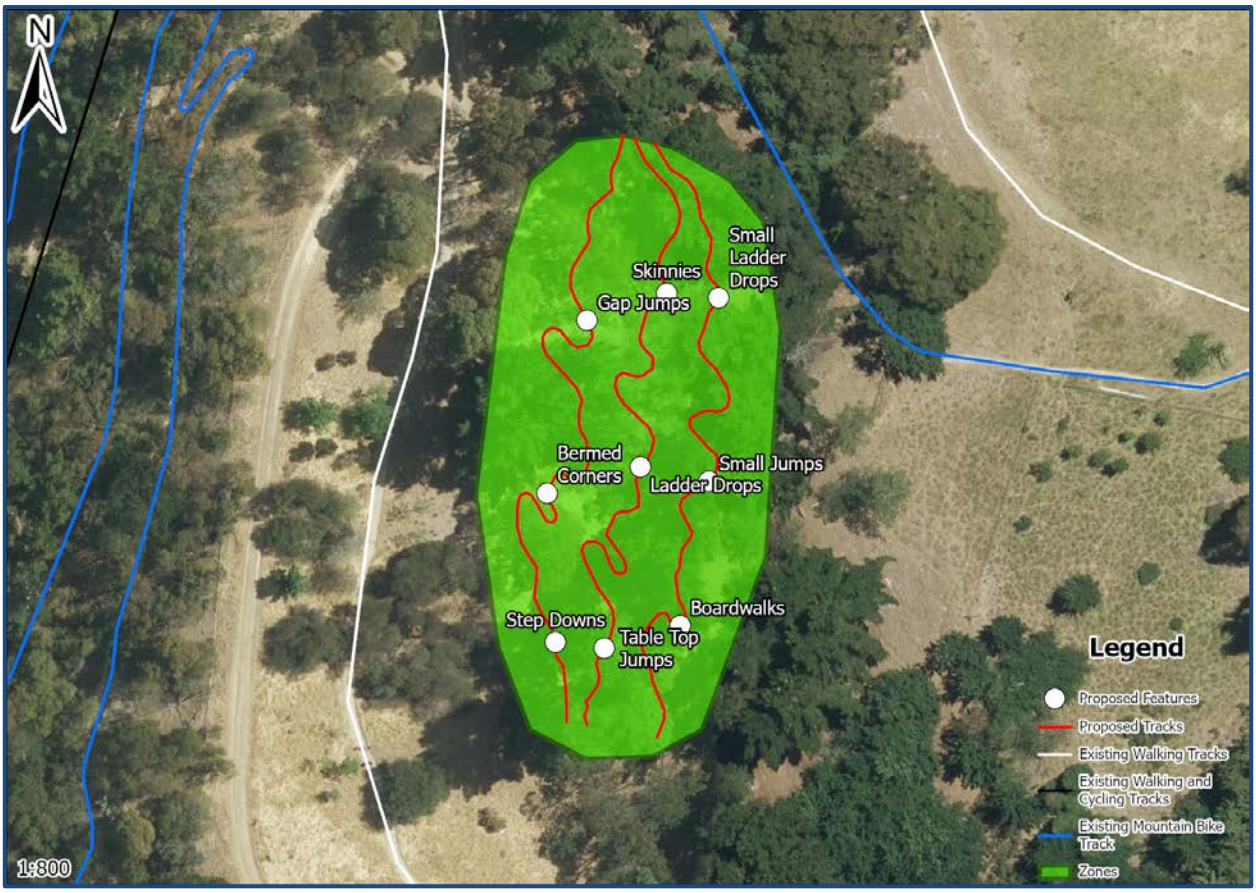
Zone 5 will have 3 trails and incorporate all the previous features. The 3 trails A, B, C will traverse across the hill separately. It's the home run after working your way through Zones 1,2,3 and 4. It's where riders will put their new learnt skills into action!

Trail features

- Board walks
- Skinnies
- Table top jumps
- Gap jumps
- Berms

Track specifications

- Tracks will be 500mm to 1m wide
- Traversing the hillside with natural drainage
- Gravel armouring on wide/flat sections of trail
- Grade 2 and 3



New tracks

Two new tracks are proposed as part of the overall development. The first is a cross country mountain bike only track that will move through each of the skills area. This is the race track that will be used for the New Zealand Schools National Mountain Bike Championship in October 2023 and then for regional and national events on a regular basis going forward as well as being available for riders at other times.

There is also proposed to be a shared biking and walking path linking the bottom of each of the skills areas.