

3. Supplementary Paper- Proposed Mountain Bike Skills Area and New Tracks – Wither Hills Farm Park

R510-014-024-07

Background

1. At the Assets and Service Committee meeting on 25 August 2022 Council agreed to the following:
 - 1.1 That public consultation on the request by the Marlborough Mountain Bike Club to establish a permanent cross country track, skills area and event hub for mountain biking on the Wither Hills Farm Park in and around the Gentle Annie Track and Rotary Lookout Track be undertaken ahead of the review of the Wither Hills Farm Park Management Plan.
 - 1.2 That the outcome of the consultation be reported to the Committee for a decision on whether to grant the following.
 - a) An event hub and skills area for mountain biking between the Gentle Annie and Rotary Lookout Tracks on the Wither Hills Farm Park.
 - b) To extend the current Mountain Bike Park area on the Wither Hills to include this proposed skills area.
2. At the Assets and Service Committee meeting on 17 November 2022 it was agreed that the report titled Proposed Mountain Bike Skills Area and New Tracks – Wither Hills Farm Park be left on the table until a workshop could be scheduled along with a visit to the site.
3. The workshop and site visit were held on Monday 28 November 2022. Two representatives of the Marlborough Mountain Bike Club (MMBC) attended the site visit along with the Wither Hills Farm Park Manager.

Workshop Discussion

4. The workshop clarified the following points:
 - 4.1 The MMBC Incorporated were granted consent (U210541) for a national secondary school cross country (XC) event in 2021. The event was postponed due to Covid.
 - 4.2 The Marlborough region has been awarded the event for October 2023. The MMBC would like to install some additional skills apparatus on the cross country track within the Wither Hills Farm Park.
 - i) A consent variation will be required for the additional skills areas.
 - ii) A consent variation may also be required if the event is to occupy the Wither Hills Farm Park site for longer than three days.
 - 4.3 The national secondary schools mountain biking event will provide for 600 competitors, is run over four days and is estimated to generate \$1.1 - 1.5M value add to the Marlborough region.
 - 4.4 A review of the 2003 Management Plan has just started and is likely to take approximately two years to complete.
 - 4.5 Council agreed to consult with users of the Gentle Annie walking track area of the Wither Hills as the proposed activity is located in an area which has traditionally used by walkers and is not a permitted activity under the Wither Hills Farm Park Management Plan 2003.
 - 4.6 490 submissions were received with approximately 85% in favour of the development of a mountain bike cross country track and skills area in the proposed location.

Site Visit to Wither Hills Farm Park

5. The site visit clarified the following points:

- 5.1 The MMBC advised that they have sponsorship funding to develop the XC track and the additional skills area and will not require Council funding assistance.
- 5.2 A number of the proposed skills zones (3, 4 and 5) are located in areas that are not widely used by the public at present. One secluded area (Zone 4) is currently used by young mountain bikers and from a health and safety perspective would benefit by additional monitoring and more activity in the area.
- 5.3 The XC track will cross the Gentle Annie walking track in one place three quarters of the way up to the Rotary Lookout. An existing mountain bike track crosses the walking track leading to the Gentle Annie area.
- 5.4 Council's Farm Park Manager advised that he would be uncomfortable grazing the area with cows if mountain bikers used the area. His concern arises from the potential damage that cows can do to the tracks. Cow and sheep grazing is currently being carried out in this area with similar impacts on the walking tracks. MMBC representatives advised during the site visit that they have no issues with ongoing grazing in the 5 zone areas.

Areas for Consideration

6. The staff report identified the following areas for consideration:

- 6.1 Soil erosion management – This matter needs to be considered and managed by experts and is an important factor to address as part of the resource consent process.
- 6.2 Farm management practices – These practices are critical from an erosion and fire risk perspective. Work is currently underway on a fire risk assessment aimed at reducing risk levels based on the amount of fuel load of grass and trees. This work will provide valuable information and inform the Management Plan under review.
- 6.3 Dedicated walking area – A 5.7 km (clockwise or anti-clockwise) walking loop exists from the Rifle Range Place carpark, to Quail Stream carpark, Lower Quail Stream track, Twin Tanks track, Rotary Lookout, Gentle Annie track, Rifle Range Place carpark (Appendix A). Zone 2 of the mountain bike proposal is located alongside the Gentle Annie track for a distance of approximately 800 metres.
- 6.4 Cross-over/conflict between bikers and walkers – There are a number of intersection points within the Farm Park that already require courtesy from both parties. Good visibility and tight advance corners should ensure biker/walker interactions occur at a low speed. The mountain bike proposal crosses over at one point close to the top of the Gentle Annie track. There are a number of other intersection points on the 5.7km loop track that have not caused major conflict issues to date.
- 6.5 Parking on surrounding streets – There is potential that additional farm park users could place pressure on the current parking and toilet infrastructure. Adequate expansion areas are available for parking within the farm park and funding for facilities in response to growth would be available from the Land Subdivision Reserve.

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