

## **WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **Report by the Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development**

**Planning Committee: 7 August 2012**

---

#### **DC12/115    Formation of mountain bike trail and training track at land to north-east of Allan Crescent, Bellsmyre, Dumbarton by Silverton and Overton Community Council**

##### **1.    REASON FOR REPORT**

- 1.1**    This application relates to land owned by the Council. Under the approved scheme of delegation it therefore requires to be determined by the Planning Committee.

##### **2.    RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1**    **Grant** full planning permission subject to conditions set out in Section 9.

##### **3.    DEVELOPMENT DETAILS**

- 3.1**    The application site covers a large area of open land on the northern edge of Bellsmyre. The site itself is comprised of two distinct areas:
- The first area is located to the north of Allan Crescent, between the vacant high flats and farmland. The land rises steeply to the north. This part of the site is covered with long grass and a few trees, and contains some existing hard-surfaced footpaths which wind across the slope and upwards towards the fields at the rear.
  - The second part of the site is located immediately to the south east of the first area, in the land behind St Peter's primary school and Murroch Avenue. This part of the site is covered with small trees and shrubs and is identified as a Local Nature Conservation Site in the Local Plan. It is also bordered by farmland to the north, and by vacant flats at Muir Road to the east.
- 3.2**    The proposed development would comprise the provision of recreational cycling facilities, with 2 different types of cycling proposed for the 2 areas above. The first area will be used to create a 'mini 4X' track. In '4X' (four-cross), four mountain bike riders race each other on a downhill course. This track would be located in the middle of the site on the grass-covered slope and would start at the top of the hill. The track would measure approximately 200 metres long and 3 metres wide. It would also have some earthworks to create a start hill measuring 6 metres by 5 metres and 1.5 metres high, and track features would measure between 0.5 metres and 1.5 metres high. This track will also be suitable for beginners and more advanced riders.

- 3.3** The second course would comprise a mountain bike 'skills loop', located mainly within the local nature conservation site in the eastern part of the site but also extending into the central area. The skills loop would provide a series of technical trail feature zones each of which would focus on one particular type of obstacle, and the purpose of the facility would be to enable riders to develop their riding skills. The skills trail would measure approximately 600 metres long and 1.2 metres wide and will typically have a skills zone every 30 to 50 metres.
- 3.4** The two bike tracks would be constructed from compacted stone with a finishing layer of stone dust, and features would be constructed with slightly sloping sides covered with top soil and grass seed. The tracks would also have drainage pipes installed and signage/interpretation boards for riders. Between the mini 4X track and the skills loop there would also be a link track in the centre of the site, which would connect the bottom of each track to the starting points at the top of the hill. The link track would follow the existing asphalt path and steps, however, the asphalt would be removed and replaced with a hardwearing layer of aggregate.
- 3.5** The facility would provide recreational facilities for people in Bellsmyre and is also intended to attract mountain bike enthusiasts from the wider area. It would be paid for mainly through applications for funding, in particular the 'Big Lottery', and the Bellsmyre Development Trust would also contribute financially. Bellsmyre Development Trust will be responsible for maintenance of the tracks, including the provision of liability insurance. The Trust will operate from the new community centre which is to be built on the site of the existing community centre adjacent to the application site. The replacement community centre was granted planning permission in 2011 and will play a key role in the operation of the bike tracks. The application previously included a third bike track behind Tay Place however this area has been withdrawn and no longer forms part of the present application.

#### **4. CONSULTATIONS**

- 4.1** West Dunbartonshire Council Road, Environmental Health, Housing and Estates Services all have no objections to the development.

#### **5. REPRESENTATIONS**

- 5.1** Four representations have been received in connection with the application, all of which express support for the development. The reasons for supporting the application can be summarised as follows:
- It will provide an activity for young people in the area;
  - It will help to promote healthy activity and sport within the community; and
  - It will contribute to the local economy by attracting people into the local area.

## **6. ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

### West Dunbartonshire Local Plan 2010

- 6.1** The western part of the site is identified as an Existing Residential Area in the Local Plan. Policy H5 concerns development within existing residential areas and states that the character and amenity of these areas will be safeguarded and where possible enhanced. It is considered that the use of parts of the open space areas associated with the vacant high flats for recreational cycle facilities would be in accordance with this policy.
- 6.2** The eastern part of the site is a Local Nature Conservation Site (LNCS) and is covered by Policy E3A, which states that the Council will seek to maintain and enhance the environmental resources of the Plan area by the protection of habitats and species which are vulnerable and/or specifically protected. Proposals should not have an adverse effect on the integrity or character of a local nature conservation site. This issue is discussed in Section 6 below, and it is considered that the impact upon conservation interests would be positive, and that the proposal would comply with Policy E3A.
- 6.3** The LNCS area is also outwith the settlement boundary and is therefore within the Green Belt. Policy GB1 provides a general presumption against development in the Green Belt, but makes exceptions for certain specified uses one of which is outdoor recreation, leisure or tourist proposals which are appropriate for the countryside and contribute to social and economic development. The proposal would be such a facility and the application is therefore in compliance with policy GB1.

## **7. ASSESSMENT AGAINST MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

### Principle of Use

- 7.1** Most of the site is currently open space associated with the vacant tower blocks, and at present the land is little used. The nearest occupied residential properties are located on the opposite side of Bellsmyre Avenue approximately 130 metres away. It is therefore considered that the use of the open space for bike tracks would be acceptable and that the tracks would not have any detrimental impact on the residential amenity of the area.

### Nature Conservation

- 7.2** Most of the mountain bike skills loop would be located within the Local Nature Conservation Site (LNCS) and Local Plan policy states that proposals should not have an adverse effect on the integrity or character of these sites. In 2008 a phase 1 habitat survey was carried out by West Dunbartonshire Council and Scottish Natural Heritage on a number of Local Nature Conservation Sites, including that within the application site. The habitat survey identified the area as neutral grassland which was moderately diverse botanically and an excellent habitat for birds and invertebrates. Neutral grassland is characterised by vegetation dominated by grasses and herbs. The survey stated that the grasslands could be restored and their habitat value enhanced through management techniques such as scrub clearance with the grasslands subsequently being managed as a hay meadow with mowing in

August/September followed by brief grazing and possible introduction of suitable species to increase floral diversity. However, the applicant has provided a further survey carried out in June 2012, which found that none of the prescribed management recommendations made in the 2008 survey had been implemented with the result that the extent of the grassland has been diminished due to scrub encroachment and that there has as a result been a loss of the protected habitat. The survey states that without urgent implementation of a proper management regime the grasslands are in danger of being lost altogether.

- 7.3** It is therefore intended to introduce a management plan as part of the mountain bike track scheme, to preserve and enhance the grassland and thus retain the nature conservation value of the habitat. This will be done by clearing the site over a programmed period of time with the removal of hawthorn scrub and unwanted vegetation where appropriate followed by the introduction of a hay meadow management regime where areas of sward will be cut at the end of each growing season and the cuttings removed in line with conventional wild grassland management techniques. The sowing of a seed mix complimentary to the site will be considered where any ground is disturbed during the construction of the trails, however, it is anticipated that introduction of a suitable management regime creating areas of open ground with 'disturbed' vegetation will assist the colonisation of native ground flora species. A condition can be attached to ensure that a suitable management regime is implemented.
- 7.4** The LNCS area does already include footpaths, although these are overgrown. The proposed mountain bike skills loop would follow these existing footpaths, which are located towards the perimeter of the site, and the trail has been designed to apply a 'light footprint' on the site with excavation and drainage works kept to a minimum. Trails will be designed to sit on the ground rather than cut into the ground which is a practice commonly used in the construction of cycle tracks on sensitive sites across Scotland. It is intended that the site will also be capable of use for walking and as an educational resource in local schools to encourage engagement and access to the countryside for residents of Bellsmyre. The Environment Trust, in association with the Bellsmyre Development Trust, also intend to develop proposals to encourage residents to participate in a programme of volunteer activities aimed at improving the management of this and other nature conservation sites within Bellsmyre. Therefore, whilst the proposal is likely to result in more people using the LNCS, the proposal has been designed to minimise the impact on the site, and the development would be accompanied by a management regime to restore the grasslands. Overall it is considered that the impact upon nature conservation interests would be positive.

#### Transport

- 7.5** It is expected that the development will attract people from outside the Bellsmyre area and therefore some car parking will be required. The streets and car parks which once served the tower blocks are currently unused and in the short term they provide more than ample parking facilities. Should the surrounding area be redeveloped for housing in the future then alternative

parking provision could be provided as part of that development as the requirement is not likely to be onerous. In the event of a large event attracting a significant number of cyclists it may be possible to arrange parking at the nearby primary school as parking demand for the mountain bike trails is unlikely to conflict with school hours. However, it is expected that most users will cycle to the tracks from Bellsmyre or elsewhere in Dumbarton and that the proposal is unlikely to give rise to any significant level of traffic.

- 7.6** It is desirable that the trails should not be used by off-road motorcycles or other powered vehicles, as this would be liable to cause noise problems and damage to the grassland, as well as damaging the trails themselves. It is intended that the site will be entirely fenced off and motor cycle barriers similar to those used at the BMX track in Clydebank will be installed to prevent motorised vehicles accessing the site.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

- 8.1** The proposed mountain bike track would use existing open space to provide a recreational facility for the benefit of the local community. It would provide an activity for local young people and would encourage participation in sport with its associated health benefits, which is in keeping with the Council's objective of encouraging a healthier lifestyle. Whilst the proposal would affect a Local Nature Conservation Site, it would provide for the proper management of the protected grasslands which would help to preserve and improve the quality of the habitat.

## **9. CONDITIONS**

- 01. The development hereby approved shall commence within a period of 3 years from the date of this decision notice.**
- 02. The developer shall submit to the Planning Authority in writing upon the forms specified for the purpose and attached to this decision notice:**
- a) A Notice of Commencement of Development as soon as practicable once it is decided to commence the development hereby approved (which shall be prior to the development commencing);**
  - b) A Notice of Completion of Development as soon as practicable once the development has been completed.**
- 03. Prior to the commencement of the development a grassland management plan shall be submitted for the further written approval of the Planning Authority and shall detail how the Local Nature Conservation Site shall be managed to improve the quality of the habitat and species diversity. The plan shall thereafter be implemented as approved.**
- 04. Prior to the commencement of the development, full details of the design and location of all walls and fences to be erected on site**

shall be submitted for the further written approval of the Planning Authority and shall be implemented as approved.

- 05 Details of the fencing/barriers to be erected on the site to prevent use of the tracks by motor-powered vehicles (including motorcycles, mopeds and quad bikes) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority prior to development commencing. The approved measures shall thereafter be implemented as approved and maintained in a condition which prevents access by such vehicles.
- 06 Notwithstanding the approved plans and prior to the commencement of development on site full details of the earthworks and path and track formations shall be submitted to and approved by the Planning Authority and shall be implemented as approved.

**Elaine Melrose**  
**Executive Director of Housing, Environmental**  
**and Economic Development**  
**Date: 20 July 2012**

---

**Person to Contact:** Pamela Clifford, Planning & Building Standards Manager,  
Housing, Environmental and Economic Development,  
Council Offices, Clydebank. G811TG.  
01389 738656  
email: [Pamela.Clifford@west-dunbarton.gov.uk](mailto:Pamela.Clifford@west-dunbarton.gov.uk)

**Appendix:** None

**Background Papers:**

1. Application forms and plans
2. West Dunbartonshire Local Plan 2010
3. Representations
4. Habitat Survey 2008 and 2012

**Wards affected:** Ward 2 (Leven)