

Whinlatter Forest, Keswick, Cumbria

Mountain Bike Trail Feasibility Study



Supported by the Lake District Sustainable Fund



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Whinlatter Forest **Mountain Bike Trail Feasibility Study**

Introduction

Over the summer of 2002 research into the social, economic, and environmental impact of a mountain biking (mtb) development programme, based upon forest singletrack trails at Whinlatter Forest, informed the need for a more detailed study. There is a well documented history on where, with whom, and how the expertise in other areas has been achieved, the lessons that have been learned, the expertise that has been acquired, and the proven benefits that such projects bring. The latest and largest illustration of this is the attraction of almost £2m by Forest Enterprise, from a variety of funding institutions, for the Seven Stanes Project across forests in Southern Scotland.

Early in this process a meeting took place between the researchers, Forest Enterprise Recreation Manager, the Recreation Ranger, and the Lake District National Park Authority Area Ranger. At that meeting clear agreement was reached on the potential of Whinlatter as a mtb trail venue, taking into account access and use constraints, and there was clear support for further detailed study into this potential.

This report is presented to establish the viability of creating a socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable Whinlatter Forest singletrack mtb trail development programme, designed around securing the appropriate levels of investment to support the following elements:-

- A Whinlatter Users Forum for participation, consultation, and support,
- Sustainable singletrack trails, skills loop, and freeride sections,
- Bikedshed at the trailhead with information, changing facilities, spares, bike hire and café.

There is a demonstrable need in the forests of the Lake District and elsewhere in Northern England to have a structured mtb trail system where mountain bikes can be ridden to an approved challenging standard whilst not endangering the safety of other forest users, or the natural habitat.

A successful model has evolved, in a variety of forests over a number of years, where mtb singletrack trails, now designed to recognised national and international standards, are being successfully constructed to allow mountain bikers of varying standards to co-exist safely with other users of the forest without adversely affecting each others' activities, enjoyment, safety, or the environment. The economic and social diversity, through retail to service, that this has attracted to deeply rural locations has created new businesses and stimulated many moribund communities.

The history of the creation and development of mtb singletrack trails in forests around the UK has identified the complexity of project management, financial planning, and multi-access user requirements. Wishing to benefit from these experiences, Forest Enterprise commissioned this Feasibility Study, in association with The Cumbria Rural Development Programme and the Lake District National Park Sustainable Development Programme, so that an in depth survey could be made of Whinlatter forest to map a network of mtb trails, that would satisfy all design and constraint requirements, *prior to any decision to embark upon a development programme.*

The study includes the design requirements of a series of potential mtb trails of varying standards between 0.8km & 40.3km in length, consideration into the potential economic impact (and identification of the need for a detailed assessment to support planning and funding applications), and an outline of multi-access constraints.

The main activities undertaken through the commission of this study were:-

- The engagement of a leading UK trail designer to survey Whinlatter, produce an outline map, and establish the route parameters,
- Conduct a 'best practice' analysis of existing mtb provision in Southern Scotland and North Wales,
- Consider impact assessments of existing multi-access provision,
- Consult with interested parties to inform the consultation process,
- Research funding streams for any prospective development programme.

The overall aim of this feasibility study is to begin a structured process of mtb development at Whinlatter Forest, which is inclusive from the start, rather than reactive or ad hoc. Sustainable development is characterised by suitably detailed preliminary work, an inclusive process that welcomes and values contributions from all interested parties, realistic impact assessments, adequate management, and risk minimisation.

What follows in this report is the detailed analysis of the salient outcomes from this two month study. All interested parties are now actively encouraged to participate, through formal submissions to Forest Enterprise, active participation in the consultation process, and representation on the Whinlatter Users Forum before any decision is made towards the end of June 2003.

The Cumbria Strategy

The Governments' Rural White Paper (RWP), published in 2000, sets out a vision for rural areas which incorporates a living countryside with thriving rural communities, access to high quality services, a working countryside with a diverse economy giving high and stable levels of employment.

Cumbria in particular was devastated by the Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) which played havoc with rural communities and their economies. Following FMD the recovery programme envisaged through the Cumbria Rural Action Zone (RAZ) requires that due consideration be given to the principles of the RWP. There are a number of regional initiatives which support RAZ, for example; the Regional Rural Recovery Plan, which seeks among other things "to renew and strengthen tourism"; the Market Towns Initiative which seeks to "target resources on rural service centres and their hinterlands - to increase the regeneration impact where required"; The Rural Cumbria Economic Development Zone which contains four objectives, viz:-

- Assist the economic repositioning of rural businesses, including their diversification,
- Building on the interdependence of the rural economy by increasing the contribution to tourism in the rural economy,
- Stimulate the economy of market towns,
- Enabling the engagement of rural communities with the regeneration process.

Furthermore, a Vision for the Rural Action Zone "Next Steps" Strategy was proclaimed (which remains the same as that defined at the outset of the RAZ) and states:-

"To enable the rebuilding and development of a dynamic rural economy for Cumbria, which is financially, socially and environmentally sustainable";

and, in order to remain consistent with the Regional Renaissance framework, the thematic proposals were translated into strategy objectives. Amongst these objectives are the following:-

- To renew and strengthen recreation and tourism,
- To deliver social and community regeneration.

The objectives contained within this feasibility study deliver on a *significant* number of the strategic objectives in Rural Renaissance, regional, and sub-regional programmes as outlined in the following Programme Matrix.

PROGRAMME	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE / AIM	OPPORTUNITY FOR WHINLATTER MTB TRAILS
RURAL MATTERS – AN UPDATE TO THE CUMBRIA RURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2000	SA 1 – maintaining and increase the contribution which tourism can make to the area’s rural economy, jobs & income SA4 – stimulate active community involvement in the development and management of rural development initiatives	Direct & in-direct benefits to rural economy from creation of new tourism product that will promote repeat visits, open up a new visitor group and operate throughout the close season. Opportunity to engage the local community as part of the Whinlatter Users Forum & Trail Support Group and to partner with the Keswick Town Partnership
RURAL CUMBRIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ZONE	Objective 2: To build on the interdependence of the rural economy, by increasing the contribution of tourism in the rural economy whilst at the same time enhancing the area’s natural heritage by; developing new forms of cultural, heritage and environmentally based tourism within rural Cumbria, which respects and enhances the existing environment for which Cumbria is justifiably world renown	Provision of a new environmentally based tourism activity within rural Cumbria which respects and enhances the existing environment
RURAL RENAISSANCE – THE REGIONAL RURAL RECOVERY PLAN (NWDA)	SO1 – A1.11 support woodland rural development programme SO2 – A2.7 extend sustainable tourism related to ...forestry, regional parks and woodland and countryside sports SO8 – A8.4 support community and social enterprise	New sustainable tourism product based upon woodland and countryside sports Opportunity to create a social enterprise via the maintenance of trails and provision of support services
CUMBRIA RURAL ACTION ZONE	RAZ Objective B – encourage income generation from direct and indirect woodland management RAZ Objective E – development of tourism product outside central Lakes and into the low season / strengthen existing brand and enable this to reflect local diversity	New tourism product outside central Lakes that will promote repeat visits, open up a new visitor group and operate throughout the close season.

In addition to the contribution that the project can make to the programmes set out above, it meets directly issues raised in the recent Locum Destination Consulting Study for Cumbria Tourist Board which identifies the need for a ‘step change’ improvement in Cumbria’s tourism product and identifies a focus on ‘high energy’ tourism focusing on outdoor activities and adventure sports in the north of the Lake District.

Economic Impact Assessment

As is demonstrated above, development of sustainable tourism products in the rural areas of the county has been identified as a key means of stimulating and supporting the regeneration of rural communities and their economies. The creation of an internationally renowned centre of mtb trails at Whinlatter Forest will attract new visitors to the area, generate economic activity and meet the identified need to provide facilities to support activity throughout the year and across the rural periphery of the county.

The economic benefits will be both direct and in-direct and accrue to a geographical catchment centred upon, but extending far beyond, the immediate locality. Areas where positive economic impact can be expected will include:-

- Immediate employment and new businesses / income generation on site,
- Support for existing businesses and jobs (mtb sales and equipment, cycle rental, training and skills providers, accommodation and food service providers, local retailers, local service and product providers),
- An increase in visitor numbers from valuable and targeted groups; (under 35's & families with children) to Keswick and the North Lakes,
- Generation of repeat visits and greater awareness of the area's wider tourist product,
- Generation of visits in the current low season and away from current 'hot-spots',
- Increased spend from additional visitors,
- A material contribution to improving the Lake Districts total tourism offer and reputation,
- Contribution to Keswick Town Partnerships MTI Action Plan.

It is not possible to assess in detail the likely impact without a formal Economic Impact Assessment (EIA); this will be carried out in the Business Case/Planning Stage (following consultation) and will take into account potential risks and sensitivities including:-

- Consequential impact on competing local businesses,
- Impact on the local infrastructure and service centres,
- Risk of failure.

The scope of the EIA will include the following:-

- Project Context and rationale,
- Appraisal Methodology,
- Costs, income and funding,
- Project benefits,
- Value for money assessment (against outputs) and cost effectiveness,
- Risks and sensitivities,
- Project management, delivery and exit,
- Monitoring and evaluation framework.

Consultees are invited to submit comments relating to a potential EIA.

Map

Presented with this report is a mtb forest map, produced in accordance with emerging national standards. It adopts the symbol systems in use across other mtb sites and would be mass produced, under sponsorship, as a free resource to all forest users.

Multi-access

The two most fundamental elements of sustainable recreational use of a forest environment is the harmonious co-existence of different user group requirements. Whilst each activity makes a range of demands on the forest structure, evidence exists across a range of forest sites that multi-access use is significantly safer when adequately managed. Though it is acknowledged that Whinlatter Forest is a more established visitor location with a larger percentage of pedestrian users.

The purpose built mtb singletrack trails subscribe to internationally recognised location and construction policies. Combined with clear and informative signage, designated horse trails, walking routes, orienteering posts, zoning and one-way flow systems, this all contributes to safe multi-use. Each of these features has been comprehensively researched and now integrated into the trail design.

The trail design overcomes any likelihood of direct trail contact between the various forest users; bikers, horse riders, bird watchers, runners and walkers. Trail design and management procedures at mtb sites across the UK have now virtually eliminated multi-use conflict. Incidents which do occur are almost exclusively the result of ‘illegal’ or ‘unofficial’ actions by particular individuals.

During the consultation period, the Consultant Team and Forest Enterprise Recreation Manager are available to discuss in greater detail with any interested parties just how this system will work in practice.

Trailhead location

A thorough onsite survey of all possible locations on the periphery and within the forest boundaries produced the clear recommendation that a designated trailhead should be located at Revelin Moss. This provides a dedicated location that utilises an existing car park, provides good access links to the skills loop, freeride location, and trail loops away from the quiet zones. It minimises multi-user conflict with the Visitor Centre clientele, Osprey Project visitors, and the main recreational walking routes.

Inevitably, the increased visitor attraction provided by the international class mtb trails will attract more visitors and the impact from traffic movements through the village of Braithwaite, which already takes traffic going to Newlands and the camp site, will be kept to a minimum. This will be done by managing Forest Enterprise official movements to off peak times and to routing heavy commercial forestry movements through another entrance point to the north on the A66, thus avoiding undue access through Braithwaite.

Parking

Evidence from other mtb sites clearly indicates that there will need to be an onsite review of the available parking provision and, as demand increases, future expansion may be necessary. This could be screened through the mature plantation above the present space or developed in the lower part of the Comb. Also, a suitable link with the second car park further to the east could produce some increased capacity.

The exact scale and location will be subject to a detailed onsite analysis from a recognised Highways Consultant. This consultation is already ongoing and the preliminary findings of the consultation and site visits will be available at the Public Forum as described in a later section. If the overall development programme were given approval, the final design brief would also take into account the design and flow management of a 'safe crossing' to the existing visitor attractions.

Bikeshed-hire/café/changing

One of the most illuminating discoveries made during the development of mtb sites across the UK is the requirement to provide a range of facilities at the trailhead. Not only is there a requirement for adequate parking, but a need for a shop for forgotten spare parts, a mechanic, bike hire for occasional riders, and the provision of adequate changing and washing facilities, a café providing quick high fibre food, pint mugs of tea.

The inclusion of each and all of these elements is now widely recognised at existing mtb sites to be a necessity rather than a luxury. While these facilities do not need to be large or sophisticated, they do need to be unobtrusive places where the mtb fraternity can 'hang out' and be suitably catered for. A similar facility has previously been sited at Revelin Moss and precedent set for sympathetic capital development.

In all cases these facilities are leased, on a franchise basis, by Forest Enterprise. One important additional feature of these facilities is that they provide a valuable source of managerial intelligence on the mtb operation, early identification of trail problems, and a central location to report issues of conflict.

Trail design

The North West District of Forest Enterprise is adopting a strategic approach to the development of mtb facilities; eg, a jump park at Delamere, family tracks at Grisedale, etc. This planning policy aims to provide sympathetically managed recreational multi-use while, it has been found, the provision much reduces illegal,

unsafe, or environmentally intrusive user impact. Taking into account the location and terrain characteristic of Whinlatter the following mtb singletrack options are proposed.

Interpretation

Whinlatter Forest Visitor Centre and Educational support has a well refined and respected reputation among schools. The interpretation themes within the forest are a much valued educational facility. The mtb trails would extend this theme through two new schemes.

Skills Loop

Orienteering puzzle maps, developing the existing Rabbit Run & Fox Trot theme, would lead the rider to waymarked points on this skills loop as a story unfolds. Each waymark will provide a further clue to solving a mystery and encourage the riders to continue on their journey. The completion of the loop and the solving of the mystery would be rewarded with a certificate back at the bikeshed when the completed route map is returned.

Aimed at the beginner or novice off-road biker the completion of the skills loop provides a taster and practice facility of this style of riding. This allows riders to sample mountain biking without committing themselves to an extended excursion into unknown territory.

The aim of this scheme is to encourage skills acquisition and confidence.

Blue Loop

A 'discovery sheet', bought from the Bikeshed, asks poignant questions about observable features at designated points on the trail which provide examples of the range of habitats found in a forest environment. This would be designed to provide a coherent element of an appropriate curriculum Key Stage.

The aim of this scheme is to increase access, encourage the notion of exploration, understanding habitat, and working together.

International quality cross-country (xc) routes

The principle behind the trail design is that mtb riders using the forest will be provided with trails designed, built and maintained to internationally recognised standards, and that these trails will be designed to ensure that mtb riders and other forest users can co exist without compromising safety. There will be four standards of trail; green, blue, red and black as recognised nationally, by the Cycling Touring Club (CTC), and internationally, by the International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA), as the quality standard hallmark for trail build. These four standards will ensure that each of the trails is constructed to provide cyclists with trails that meet their technical expertise and fitness. The green trails are the least technically and physically challenging and the black are the most severe. The trails will be supported by unambiguous signing and free literature at the trailhead.

This will ensure that riders will be left in no doubt as to which trails suit their capabilities.

One important aspect of these trail standards is to provide an immediate 'at standard' technical feature within the first 15m of any trail. This provides the rider with an unambiguous test of their technical ability before they embark on a long and often remote ride. It has the impact of stopping over confident but under skilled riders from beginning a journey they may not be able to safely complete.

In addition to this there will be a separate 'skills loop' where young children and novice riders, who are embarking on mtb, can learn, practice, and acquire mtb skills under adequate supervision.

Freeride

This section of the trail system is characterised by fast, tight, technical features providing a 'rollercoaster' downhill ride. Modelled on the best features available at other mtb sites, this section will be built, maintained, continually upgraded, and modified by the volunteer Whinlatter Trail Support Group. Confined within a restricted area, for the safety of onlookers, this trail will belong to the local mtb club.

Walking & horse trails

There is a recognition that as part of the development programme not only must the particular requirements of these two user groups be considered but new trail facilities should be opened up. It is proposed to embark upon continued dialogue with these user groups to establish clear and detailed proposals to develop these trail facilities. The development programme management contract will include a specific element in recognition of this requirement.

The format of the trail design prevents any likelihood of physical contact or impact between the various forest users; runners, bikers, horse rides and walkers. To overcome this the trails have been carefully designed with the following characteristics:-

- In the main the cycle routes are singletrack one way trails,
- The trails for walking, horse riding and cycling are so far as practicable kept separate,
- Cycling on certain sensitive bridleways (eg; above Seldom Seen) will be positively discouraged by designing access out of the trails,
- On any part of the trails where cyclists and horse riders are on the same route, the trail is designed so that the cyclist will approach the horse rider head on and at a slow pace to avoid alarm,
- There will be continuous and proactive management of the mtb trails

All of these characteristics will be supported with unambiguous signing and free literature at the trailhead and Visitor Centre.

Road crossings

As is clear from the map depicting the various trails, there are several points at which bikes cross the B5292. The majority of these are existing crossing points although there is one additional point where pedestrians and cyclists will cross between the Visitor Centre and Revelin Moss car park where the new trailhead is proposed. This was referred to in the permissions section relating to the County Council as Highway Authority. At each of these crossing points the trails will be designed with multiple tight chicanes so that cyclists must dismount to negotiate them. This will have the effect of slowing cyclists down to such a degree that they must cross the highway at walking pace. In addition to this there will be clear and unambiguous signing on all trails and alert users of the road approach. There will also be signs on the highway to warn motorists of the possibility of riders on foot on the highway ahead.

This signage will be agreed with officers of the Highways and Transportation Section of the County Council and LDNPA. The consultation with the Highway Authority is well under way and results of this and site meetings held will be presented at the public Forum.

Rural Transport Partnership

An approach was made to the Rural Transport Partnership to establish the possibility of providing a shuttle bus provision from Keswick. This programme is, reportedly, now so oversubscribed that the availability of funding for such a bus route stands little chance of success.

Contract management

The contract awarded by Forest Enterprise, the fund holder, will contain all the legal requirements and safeguards necessary for the utilisation of public funds. The drawing down of these funds and the cashflow for the project will be scheduled within their appropriate internal procedures; as is the case at their other development locations across the UK.

In respect of a development programme at Whinlatter Forest, there will be a number of special features which experience at other mtb sites indicate as best practice:-

- Ongoing support to all identified forest users,
- Liaison through an inclusive User Forum,

- Development expertise to specific interest groups,
- Continuing involvement of a recognised UK trail designer,
- A ‘total marketing’ strategy,
- Integrated website locations,
- Interpretation & support materials,
- A build, maintenance, and improvement programme,
- A litter management procedure,
- Event management responsibility.

Finance

Many mtb sites now exist across the UK and much detailed financial data is available to cost the creation of new locations. The Seven Stanes programme across Southern Scotland is developing seven forest locations to a budget of £2m. The Welsh Assembly has recently dedicated £500k to support new provision in recognition of the sustainable regeneration benefits that accrue in deeply rural areas. The detailed financial planning for a mtb development programme in Whinlatter Forest will be undertaken during a business planning stage. However, early indications of the overall investment package look to be in the region of £1m+.

Again, much fund sourcing has occurred at other locations and this study identified those which are most likely to support a development programme at Whinlatter. They are:-

- Forest Enterprise,
- European NW Objective 2,
- Rural Action Zone,
- Heritage Lottery Fund,
- Commercial sponsorship.

Outline discussions have already taken place with Officers in each of these agencies and initial indications are that support would be forthcoming. As each funding stream has particular criteria and outputs that form an essential element of the overall programme, a dedicated ‘portfolio’ funding programme would be created to provide the additionality required.

Timescales & processes

Notoriously difficult though it may be to commit in this report, with any absolute certainty, what the application processes for funds and the development work for permissions may be, it would appear that the following is a realistic planning framework, should the programme proceed:-

- 20 may '03 Feasibility Study Report published,
- 17 june end of consultation period,
- 17 june + Forest Enterprise decision,
- july/aug business planning,
- sept/dec funding & permissions application submissions,
- jan '04 build programme commences,
trailhead development work,
marketing, website, materials,
- may first trails open,
- '04-'06 build, maintenance, improvement programme.

Permissions

This section of the report relates to the permissions required for development associated with Forestry Commission land.

Planning Permission

In discussions with the relevant planning authority for the area, the Lake District National Park Authority (LDNPA), it has been agreed that should the feasibility study receive Forestry Enterprise approval, a full submission will be made to the LDNPA as if the entire proposal required permission, and the Authority Officers will deal with it appropriately. This will mean that some parts of the proposal e.g. buildings, may be subject to the permission process, whilst other parts, e.g. alteration of existing trails may not. However, on submission of the proposal the LDNPA will carry out its consultation process and determine the necessary permissions.

Water Extraction rights

The Environment Agency is the relevant Government Agency dealing with the rights to abstract water. As the proposal involves extraction of water from a new source within the forest to serve any new buildings, the Agency has been involved. This procedure will be subject to ongoing dialogue.

The Environment Agency (on conservation issues)

Consultation has taken place with Environment Agency officials with regard to watercourses, still waters, and conservation issues surrounding them. Construction of the proposed trails and on-going maintenance will ensure that no surface water run-off will occur which will detrimentally affect the SSSI and the Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Ongoing involvement by Forest Enterprise on the Bassenthwaite Restoration Group will ensure that positive steps are taken to manage out any possibility of run-off to the lake. Any potential for erosion products will be subject to strict control, design and maintenance to Environment Agency approval. The proposal introduces positive actions to enhance the environmental protection of the natural resources, as the 'do nothing option' will only perpetuate the construction of unauthorised mountain bike trails in the forest by amateurs, which cause the erosion problems. A construction and maintenance

contract, with binding conditions, will ensure that the environment is protected in a proactive and positive way.

Crossing of private neighbouring land

The route plan shows a proposed option for a small section of black trail to cross private land owned by Lord Inglewood and tenanted by a local farmer. The option provides a more coherent ride and overcomes the need to provide two crossings of Aiken Beck to remain in Forest Enterprise land. The matter is currently under discussion with the land agent acting for Lord Inglewood.

Cumbria County Council as Highway Authority

The proposal envisages the trailhead at Revelin Moss car park. Inevitably, there will be cycle and pedestrian movement between this site and the Whinlatter Visitors Centre across the B5292. The Highways and Transportation Officer has been consulted on this and as a result a safe crossing to highway construction criteria, together with adequate visibility, appropriate and unambiguous warning signage will be introduced. Also, trail design characteristics will obviate the hazard. (This is detailed in a separate section).

Polite agreements

This section contains the detail of the consultations, contacts and liaison with agencies, authorities, neighbouring landowners, groups and organisations which whilst not required to give permission for development in Government Department land were nevertheless invited to make comment on the study.

The National Trust

The Trust Officers stated broad agreement with the proposals contained in the study. The view was expressed that structured, regularised and properly managed mtb trails within the Forest would reduce the unauthorised, irresponsible riding on footpaths and other rights of way in the area on which cycling was not permitted. Professional trail design and proper management would overcome any 'breakouts' onto footpaths on open fell.

Friends of the Lake District (FOLD)

Meetings were held with the Director and Staff of the Trust and a number of issues were discussed. It was acknowledged that the overall proposal meets with targets within the England Forest Strategy, which has objectives to widen the use of the forest for leisure and community activities. It is the view of FOLD that the impact of a "hot spot" attraction on areas of the Lake District proximate to them, but not directly associated, can be significant and that the knock on effect can create conflict. As such, it was suggested that the Project should offer bikers a variety of specialism in its routes so that it would attract bikers from other areas.

Forest Enterprise has a Section 62 duty to the National Park in respect of development within the forest. It was queried whether the development would be

conflicting or contributory to the use of the forest, increased car journeys would create an unacceptable impact, and, would the proposal impact adversely on other forest users? There was also debate about ensuring the design of the trails would not create any conflict with the ability for forest walkers to exercise their desire line for walking and negate the right of walkers to use the forest unimpeded.

FOLD maintains that the existing forest boundaries are inappropriate in landscape terms and in species management, with a resultant effect on visual amenity and water quality. This has been addressed in the Whinlatter Forest Design Plan and is being put into practice though, naturally, it does take some not inconsiderable time to show effect. However, FOLD questioned the over-commercialisation of Whinlatter Forest while accepting that in respect of this proposal, praxis/FE are acting as service providers to the leisure/sporting world of mountain biking. Detailed discussion took place on how wide proposed tracks would be and the impact of ramblers on cyclists and the sensitivity of combined usage.

Cumbria County Council

(Councillor S. Hinde and Phil Atherton, Area Support Manager, Allerdale)

General support for the proposal and the potential for tourism expansion, economic regeneration and employment prospects in the north of the County. The road traffic position was raised as an issue. A site meeting is to be held with both the elected County Council and Borough Council representatives.

Allerdale Borough Council

(Councillor T Heslop)

General support for the proposal and the economic regeneration potential, though expression of some concern over the potential increase in traffic through the village of Braithwaite.

Above Derwent Parish Council

Two meetings were held with members of the Parish Council and a number of points were discussed at some length. Concern was expressed that the potential increase in vehicle numbers coming through Braithwaite could create a road safety hazard. The Council suggested that Forest Enterprise should consider a one-way exit from the forest car park, using upgraded forest roads, which, it was suggested, would reduce traffic flow through Braithwaite.

Members asked what guarantee would there be that the bikers would not stray off the proposed trails onto footpaths and create potential conflict with new and existing forest users. They identified safety problems with bikers egressing from the forest at Seldom Seen and, in particular, crossing the wooden bridge from Keswick without dismounting. There was a suggestion of an alternative access to the forest on the north side of Whinlatter, off the A66, and it was undertaken to thoroughly examine the practicality of this as part of the feasibility study process.

The Consultants offered to walk the ground with Councillors at Thornthwaite and Seldom Seen to assess issues raised and to meet with residents of the Parish.

The Lake District Osprey Society

The Manager of the project provides written support for the proposal and the benefits it brings. He sees no detrimental effect to the ospreys and their nest.

West Cumbria Orienteering Society

A site visit to the forest is being arranged with representatives of this group who have an interest in the forest as regular users. As a result of this contact, it was suggested that electronic orienteering posts could be a valued resource for both orienteers and mtb trailquest riding.

English Nature

Meetings have been held with officials of English Nature where concern was expressed, and reassurance given, that mtb trails will not enter any Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). A map of the SSSI's in Whinlatter Forest was provided and used by the Trail Designer in the trail design process. Though, not included on the SSSI map, were two "no go" areas; the ghyll up to Spout Force waterfall on the Lorton side, and, the Clerk on the footpath up to Lord's Seat.

A further area of concern was that construction work does not add to the sedimentation of Bassenthwaite by wash out of sub soil. Bassenthwaite is a particularly sensitive area and the phosphorous levels in the lake are becoming unacceptably high (see comments on Environment Agency consultation).

The Keswick Partnership

At the time of writing this group, having grown from the Countryside Agency Market Towns initiative, is organising an inaugural Annual General Meeting for which an invitation to the Consultant Team has been extended. A number of representatives have been contacted either individually or through their positions on other public bodies. The support for the overall development programme, and the designation of Whinlatter Forest as a site of international mtb significance, has been particularly strong.

Keswick Town Council

A presentation was made to a Council meeting and detailed discussions of the overall development programme took place. This was enthusiastically received and a number of Councillors voiced their particular support. This meeting was given widespread coverage by the local print media, helping to 'place' this initiative within the wider regeneration context and publicise the feasibility process.

The Keswick Tourism Association

A meeting of the General Committee of the KTA was attended and the proposal explained. Support was expressed for the study and details of it have been distributed to all members of the association through its newsletter procedure.

IMBA-UK

Recently launched at Coed-y-Brenin during the Fat Tyre mtb festival this membership organisation has developed as a result of dedicated work by mountain bike enthusiasts and Forestry Enterprise staff. It is the culmination of work between this group and IMBA in the US and internationally, which has 30,000 members. As a result of this work a Board of volunteer Directors were confirmed with a mandate to develop IMBA-UK. This group will have financial and logistical support from IMBA with the agreement that all funds raised in the UK be used for trail development here. The spearhead has already had fantastic success with trails in Wales and Scotland and is pledged to support the building of new trails, such as the one which is the subject of this study, and to help maintain the existing network.

Mountain Bike Shops

The retail mountain bike outlets in the Keswick/Cockermouth area and across the central Lakes have been contacted in relation to their potential commercial interest in the proposal. They have, not unexpectedly, declared unanimous support for the project and expressed interest in being considered for any franchise which may result.

The Ramblers Association

Discussion has taken place with Officials of the Association, and whilst the principle of the proposal is broadly welcomed, matters of mutual interest require an ongoing dialogue to be maintained with site visits planned to examine proposed routes and possible pinch points with co-users of the forest.

DEFRA

This Government Department has indicated that it welcomes the proposal to promote regeneration in the rural areas whilst protecting the environment.

The Tourism Conservation Partnership

The Partnership has been contacted and are supportive of the proposal.

-:-

The following bodies were sent details of the study together with a press release, but have not yet responded to the invitation to consult:-

Cumbria Tourist Board

Lorton Parish Council

SusTrans

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

The West Cumbrian Equestrian Society

The British Horse Society

Friends of the Earth

Stagecoach

The consultation process

This report has been produced with funding from:-
Forest Enterprise; the North West Development Agency Rural Development Programme; the Lake District National Park Authority Sustainability Programme.

The public launch of this Feasibility Study took place at an inaugural open meeting of the Whinlatter Users Forum; Rawnsley Hall, Keswick at 7.30pm, 20 May '03. There follows a formal consultation period of 28 days prior to consideration of the development programme by Forest Enterprise.

A narrative of the feasibility study process and further copies of this report are available at:-

mtb-lakes.com

All organisations, agencies, or individuals wishing to make a representation, are requested to make a submission in writing to:-

The Recreation Manager
Forest Enterprise
Whinlatter Visitors Centre
Braithwaite
Keswick
Cumbria
CA12 5TW

adrian.jones@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

The Consultant Team are available to make presentations on this development project or provide greater detail of any particular aspect:-

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