

## **Tarland Trails Public Consultation Analysis**

This report has been compiled following the Tarland Trails#2 (TT#2) consultation event culminating in the evening event on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> February 2017. The purpose of this report is to summarise the results of the consultation and to make some initial responses. It will be taken to key stakeholders, available publicly and ultimately used to inform Tarland Development Group (TDG) trustees on how and if the project can move forward.

**Pre Consultation** - All households in the Howe of Cromar were leafleted by bike. Extra identified households who owned or rode horses in the area were given a leaflet too. Thanks go to Snorri Rasmussen for delivering the leaflets. No phone calls were received but there were quite a few emails for and against with questions and some comments on Facebook. Approximately thirty people looked at the plans over the course of the week leading up to the main event. No-one took the documents away but some read them in the shops. The Access Officer from the British Horse Society (BHS) came out to view the documents and met with the project coordinator. Thanks are expressed to the businesses in the square for holding the documents; the Paper Shop, the Post Office and the Pharmacy. Finally thanks are expressed to all who took part in the consultation.

## **Consultation Results**

### **Headline stats - Quantitative Data**

For: 49 responses (58%), For with reservations or suggestions: 11 (13%), For Total: 60 responses (71%)

Against: 25 responses (29%)

Total: 85 responses (12% of households).

### **Headline stats - Qualitative Data**

For: 69 comments (39%), 46 comments in support from 30 responses

For with reservations or suggestions: 12 (7%), For Total: 81 (46%)

Against: 98 comments (54%) - 51 comments against from 7 responses.

Total: 179 comments

**Summary:** A large majority of households were in favour, but a substantial minority were strongly opposed and took time to make comments, those in favour made fewer in the way of comments.

**Themes** - All consultation comments were categorised into eight broad themes. Some comments were disregarded due to their irrelevance to this project. The comments are summarised followed by a response from the committee.

**1) Environment** - This broad area had one of the larger numbers of responses from opponents:

- a) The noise of bikes will disturb the quiet of the area.
- b) There will be a detrimental effect on wildlife (mentioned five times). Also the project would 'Undermine the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust' work carried out on the estate.
- c) The beauty of the area and existing character will be damaged.
- d) Private water supplies might be affected (particularly by the toilets).
- e) Litter could be a problem.
- f) The Queens View would be spoiled.

### **Response:**

- a) Clearly there will be more bikers on the hill when the trails are complete than there are now although the density of bikes would be low over the length of the trails (26km). The maximum number on the busiest day would be about 100, which equates to 4 riders for every kilometre of trail. Usually there would be far fewer. The Trustees/Steering Group visited Glenlivet Mountain Bike Trails (GLMBT) and were impressed by how quiet the area is. The car park is most likely to be the busiest area, although since there will be no café or other facilities there will be no reason for riders to spend much time there. During the Trustees Visit to Glenlivet, we were the only walkers present.
- b) Wildlife concerns will be addressed by a walkover survey conducted by ecologists in a 50m corridor either side of the proposed trails (total 100m corridor). This is a requirement of the planning process which will also determine what mitigation measures are needed (if permission is given).

- c) The trails will be mostly built in forested areas and will not be visible from more than a few metres away. The exception to this is the slopes of Pressendye where the trail crosses the hill. The construction here would be bench cut into the hill, reducing its visibility, but it should be noted that this area is planned to be planted with plantation forest by the landowners.
- d) The proposed toilets would be a vaulted Natsol composting toilet installed the required distance from water supplies (soak away) or a zero discharge design – subject to planning approval. This will be investigated further.
- e) Litter could potentially be a problem. Camper vans and other drivers sometimes leave bags of rubbish at the Glenlivet car park. In the management plans litter collection could be part of a contracted person's duty. Litter dropped by cyclists on the trails could also be a problem though no more so than with walking trails. As with Drummy Woods many of our volunteers ride the trails and stop to pick up litter as part of their commitment to TDG/TT.
- f) Neither the trails nor the car park will be visible from The Queen's View although the bottom part of the track will be more obvious from the road and surrounding areas than it is at present. It will to some extent blend in over time.

## **2) Roads/Traffic/Infrastructure (Existing)**

- a) The increased number of visitors will impact on parking in the Square.
- b) There will be an increase in the number of cars using the Coull road which is very narrow.
- c) Traffic and noise will increase at Queen's View

### **Response:**

- a) Parking in the square could be a problem, as indeed it is at the moment when there is an event on. The study suggests 50% of users to the proposed project would visit the village bringing an estimated 22 cars to the Square, spread throughout the day, on the busiest day in August. Cromar Community Council (CCC) could be asked to look at additional car parking in the village and how this can be resolved. This is something that needs to be addressed regardless of the mountain bike trails.
- b) The Coull road would likely be used by Aboyne residents since anyone coming from further west could come via Ordie and Tarland, and anyone from further east via Lumphanan or Dess. This is likely to be a very small number of additional users, possibly as few as one per week on average. The trails would be signposted via Tarland with every effort made to divert traffic away from this road.
- c) There will be an increase in traffic on the B9119, mostly coming from the east via The Queen's View but also to a lesser extent from the west. The numbers will be very small compared to the total traffic on the road, with an estimated maximum of 47 cars on the busiest day for the trails. There are no traffic estimates for this road, but there are for the A97 from Dinnet to Ordie and the A980 from Torphins to Lumphanan, judging by these it is unlikely that the trails would increase the total numbers by even 5% on the busiest day.

## **3) Impact on businesses in the village**

- a) The car park is too far away to bring business to the village.
- b) Businesses would benefit but other local people would not.
- c) Increased visitor numbers to the village will result in a loss of character.

### **Response:**

- a) The feasibility study suggested that 50% of users will visit Tarland, and that the proposed voucher scheme would encourage them to spend money here. Businesses within The Square have spoken positively about the prospect of the TT#2 project and the potential benefits. As was evident on a recent fact finding visit to Tomintoul, it would appear, in discussion with a community representative; that the Glenlivet trails (4 miles outwith Tomintoul) have brought business to the village and most people are positive, though they would still like a cycle path to connect the village to the trails. They hold an enduro event every year which starts in the village and brings people into the centre. Something similar could be held in Tarland.

- b) There are certainly some mountain bikers within the Cromar area who will use the trails, and everyone will benefit if the local businesses are helped to survive.
- c) The aim of the project is undeniably to increase the number of visitors to Tarland. Some people may think this is a negative thing.

#### **4) Proposed access track and Car park**

- a) The proposed car park is too far from the village.
- b) The car park exit would be dangerous.
- c) Bikers will ride down the beech belties into the village.
- d) The traffic up the track will be noisy.
- e) The track is too steep, and compacted soil and run-off will cause drainage problems.
- f) The track will ice up in winter.

#### **Response:**

We are aware that the proposed car park site is of great concern to some residents, particularly those living near the site. We are actively investigating other possibilities but this was part of the feasibility study and no other site could be identified by the consultants. The proposed site has a lot of advantages – it is well located for the trails, avoiding a long or difficult ride in, it cannot be seen from the Howe or from local hills (though the bottom of the track can be seen from some places) and the track has no houses or farms on it and is not much used. Specific answers to the points above are:

- a) It is probably the case that more bikers would visit the village if the car park was closer, though it would have to be almost in the village for this to be significant (ie within easy riding distance). This may however cause another problem, in that people may choose to park in Tarland for free rather than paying to use the official car park. It is not known how big a problem this might be.
- b) We are aware there are difficult sight lines looking downhill. A planning application would require this to be addressed by improving visibility in line with Aberdeenshire Council Roads Department guidelines.
- c) It will be necessary to construct a connection to the village that avoids the walking paths, along the belties and elsewhere. This was not part of the feasibility study. It will be primarily for people riding from the village, either because they live here, or potentially from a bike hire business. One possibility might be a link to the road near Ranna.
- d) There will inevitably be some noise from the track, but tree planting, bunding, a well compacted surface and speed limit signs would help to lower the impact. The number of cars is not likely to be very high most of the time. On a Saturday in August, in a stabilised year, it's estimated that the track could see 43 cars. Most days there will be no more than 10 or 15 cars all day.
- e) Drainage management is key to a successful trail centre and this would be part of the plans. The proposed trail is the same steepness in parts as at Glenlivet. Giving way to uphill traffic by way of use of passing places would be part of the traffic management.
- f) True, but there will be very little use of the trails in those conditions. There could potentially be a snow/ice gate at the bottom of the track.

#### **5) Anti Social Behaviour**

- a) The toilets could be vandalised
- b) Drug addicts will use the toilets and crime will increase.

#### **Response:**

Given the very low levels of crime and anti-social behaviour in the Cromar area these are thought to be very low risks. Glenlivet leave their toilets open 24 hours and they have never been vandalised, though toilet rolls have been stolen.

#### **6) Management and Maintenance**

- a) The trails will not be maintained.
- b) The track and car park will not be maintained.

**Response:**

- a) On-going management is a key part of the project. The successful Glenlivet management plan can be replicated by using car park revenue to pay a contractor to look after the trails and facilities, supplemented by volunteer time. The steering group also have a lot of useful experience and lessons learned from managing the Drummy Woods trails. Mountain bikers will sometimes use the tracks to the top of Pressendye and elsewhere though since these are both harder and less interesting to ride than built trails this will be in quite small numbers. Signage can deter most riders from the more sensitive paths. There may be some building of unofficial trails, there is Forestry Commission guidance on this which can be adopted as part of the management plan.
- b) This is high on the steering group agenda as we have had to deal with repairing the access to Drummy Woods. In the construction phase extra work would be carried out ensure the track is future proof/sustainable with additional drainage and extra money set aside. As this track is used by farm vehicles (and potentially forestry vehicles) then additional passing places would be added at suitable points. This all has to be managed.

**7) Recreational conflict –**

- a) There are already trails there.
- b) A large number of bikers would spoil the peace and quiet of the area.
- c) There will be conflict with other users (horses and walkers).

**Response:**

- a) True, but they are only known to locals and in any case could not support large numbers of new riders. The aim of this project is to attract new riders and built trails are a known, safer quantity to visitors especially families.
- b) This was discussed in the environment section. Mountain bike trail centres are almost always very quiet places, the number of visitors is very small compared to the length of the trails. At the Glenlivet visit we saw fewer than ten bikes when walking to the summit of Carn Daimh. Although the predicted 13,000 visitors sounds like a very large number, spread out over a year and 26km of trails, it is not.
- c) As with Drummy Woods, trails would be kept separate and crossing points would be managed. Five horse riders responded positively to the project, being willing to work with the steering group in the planning application phase for the benefit of both user groups. Additionally a map was supplied by a horse rider of the routes they ride and overlaps would need to be looked at or addressed before a planning application.

**8) Agriculture**

- a) There is a risk to sheep from dogs both due to worrying and disease.
- b) Improved access to the car park may lead to theft of livestock.

**Response:**

The tenant farmer most affected by the proposed trails objects to the project so the coordinator and another TDG trustee are willing to meet him to discuss his objections and plan any mitigation measures thought necessary. We will also discuss the issues with the land owner. In answer to the specific points:

- a) True, but far fewer mountain bikers than walkers take dogs with them. The risk can be mitigated by promoting responsible dog ownership and fencing to separate livestock from the trails.
- b) This is possible but thought to be a low risk. There are many other places with sheep in nearby fields.

**Summary** - The consultation process has been carried out in a similar manner to previous TDG projects and we hope has been fair to all groups by encouraging unbiased representation. The aim of the steering group is to implement a project that is as beneficial as possible to the entire community and we will take all objections and suggestions into account. Should you wish to comment on the contents of the report or its findings please get in touch by emailing [tarlandtrails@gmail.com](mailto:tarlandtrails@gmail.com) or using Facebook messenger.