

## Mole Valley Cycling Forum (MVCF) third response to Ranmore BMX/MTB bike track consultation 6<sup>th</sup> June 2021

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This third Mole Valley cycling Forum (MVCF) response on the Ranmore BMX/MTB bike track consultation has been prepared in response to the Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) paper (Agenda Item No. 9), authored by Ismina Harvey, to be taken to MVDC Scrutiny and Cabinet meetings in June. Where possible the responses below follow the titles and numbering in the MVDC document.

MVCF first two responses are included as Annexes for information.

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### Executive summary

It states that many of the tracks are unusable, this is incorrect, almost all of the tracks are in use. No figures are given for track usage or changes of such. The track has always been maintained by volunteers, for its nearly 20 years existence. There will always be a natural level of turnover. 269 people have come forward to volunteer, therefore there is no shortage of volunteers.

The proposal appears to be contrary to council strategy: Promote opportunities for residents of all ages to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives AND encourage participation in sports; there is a high risk that being charged entry will deter local children from using the site. The support for the proposal from the social media feedback appears primarily to come from the older demographic of 30 - 40 yr old male MTB rider.

### 1. Background/introduction

- 1.1 2 hectares is too small for the proposed project. Ongoing maintenance cost is cited as a challenge, however, the Employment and Resource section states the saving on management would be slight (although no monetary figure is given anywhere within the document.) Section 6.0 states there would be a marginal saving and the financial return from the lease is described as small. A further challenge is given as anti-social behaviour - there is very little, if any, since the barrier gate has been installed to prevent motorised quad bikes from using the site. A key factor in managing anti-social behaviour is through provision of suitable activities for youngsters. Making this a 'paid for' location is likely to increase the risk of anti-social behaviour as children who may be happily occupied at the site, as a free amenity, will look for other things to do if a charge is levied.
- 1.2 Maintenance described as high level, this is in contradiction to elsewhere in the document.
- 1.3 The location has never been unusable due to lack of maintenance. If 1 or 2 volunteers have been adequate to maintain the site for the past many years, a pool of 269 volunteers would surely be able to ensure sufficient maintenance?
- 1.4 How do police figures on antisocial behaviour at this site compare to that at other locations? There is not quad bike issues, there was a temporary issue caused by neighbouring residents and dirt biker issues which were occasional and effectively dealt with by the police. Please check the number of reports to the police and compare with other local areas. Removal of the non-sanctioned jumps by the council has caused more loss of track than the installation of these jumps, and the ground has been left loose and unusable. Installation of non-sanctioned jumps is an issue across the region, not only at this location.

### 2. The Proposal

- 2.1. Only 1 proposal has been given – this does not provide a reasonable level of choice for consideration.
- 2.2. Trial Academy (TA) is a very small company – how many additional staff members will be required to ensure the site is fully staffed and how will the additional wages be met? The location is far too small to have a sufficient level of interest to all levels of bike users – as described.
- 2.3. The proposal is in opposition to the stated short term objective: to provide a community asset for all ages, genders and abilities. Children, particularly girls, are likely to be put off by a change in user demographic to older, mostly men, with the desire to ride hard and do big jumps.
- 2.4. Utilities, water and electricity will need to be installed, who will meet the cost of this?

## Mole Valley Cycling Forum (MVCF) third response to Ranmore BMX/MTB bike track consultation 6<sup>th</sup> June 2021

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- 2.5. How much are TA planning to spend on the re-modelling? A 25 year old minimum wage earner working 6 days a week for 7 hours a day will cost close to £20,000 in wages alone.
- 2.6. Provision of toilets will also need sewerage connection which is not currently available.
- 2.7. If the site will only be open 6 days a week, there will reduce the amenity availability by 15%.
- 2.8. How many tickets will need to be sold in order to make the location profitable / sustainable? What will happen to the site if the proposal fails? Is there a 5 year business plan and has this been reviewed for viability?
- 2.9. TA propose to spend £50 000 on remodelling - are these funds secured? What are the conditions of receiving external funding? It is understood that a quotation of £150,000 was made 4 years ago for a similar development.

### 3. Consultation

- 3.1 Due to GDPR, a wide range of school pupils and parents, and allotment holders do not appear to have been made aware of the consultation.
  - 3.2 Ranmore Road Allotment Site Agent is listed as a consultee, however, he did not discuss this matter with the allotment holders, therefore any comments should be noted as his personal opinion only.
  - 3.3 Mole Valley Cycling Forum (MVCF) has already provided two responses - <https://mvcf.org.uk/assets/documents/ranmore-track-may2021> - and is not in favour of the development as it currently stands. In particular .. We are in full agreement with the concern expressed in a MVDC briefing document which states that: ***"...a key risk is around accessibility to the site. It is currently free to use and available to all....."*** and that ***"The proposal will make it a paid for service, and therefore there is a risk that it becomes inaccessible to some people, as well as being a potential reputational risk."***
  - 3.4 Proposed mitigation for lack of parking is not to provide parking provision on site for users. This is not realistic.
  - 3.5 The consultation was unacceptably short, just 2 weeks, and did not capture all relevant questions:
    - Residency location, age or gender of respondents were not captured;
    - It was not fully distributed to local residents for example due to GDPR and posters/banners being removed.
    - It was heavily promoted to 'serious mountain bike riders' on facebook and Instagram. Social media posts stating 'please respond, this means so much to us';
    - 40% of respondents have 'never' or 'other' visited the site, yet most have commented on the current management/maintenance of the track – how can they have knowledge of this if they have never visited the site?
    - No question was included to measure if respondents would be more or less likely to visit the site if the proposal went ahead and if this would be impacted by the need to pay for access.
  - 3.6 269 people volunteered to assist to maintain the site and 333 were not sure. This is a significant number of volunteers.
  - 3.7 No costings are shown to demonstrate how many visitors the site expect to receive and how many are necessary in order to the proposal to be financially viable – these figures will be needed to assess the required number of car parking spaces.
  - 3.8 How many tickets will need to be sold to pay the staffing costs? 1 person at minimum wage working 7 hours a day would incur a wage bill of £19,000, of also consider 2 staff parking places are noted.
  - 3.9 There are 14 bike track businesses south of London (Google search), 33 skate parks in West Sussex alone (Horsham District website).
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**Mole Valley Cycling Forum (MVCF) third response to Ranmore BMX/MTB bike track consultation**  
**6<sup>th</sup> June 2021**

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**4. Benefits**

4.1 Reduced costs – no figures are given in the document about on-going maintenance costs or the level of lease income from the proposal.

**5. Next steps**

The council must provide a range of options for people to consider.

6. If the proposal goes ahead but is not successful what will be the cost to the council for the site to be remediated and returned to the council?

**7 Legal implications**

7.0 The proposal would be environmentally detrimental - the location is home to protected species (nightingales which are on the RSPB red list), the council could be liable to penalty if the habitat to the rear of the site is destroyed. No ecological surgery has been provided.

In it's current state, the lease proposal is not in line with MVDC core strategy and appears to be financially unviable.

**8.0 Risk**

It is recognised that the introduction of fees for use of amenity, disproportionately impacts children and low income families and risks perpetuating anti-social behaviour. The loss of free access to this community asset could have negative mental and physical health implications for local people, in particular children.

**9.0 Options**

MVDC should provide a range of options or hold public meetings to discuss, and include the 269 maintenance volunteers.

Sustainability issues: Priority in all council decisions must be primarily based around the potential or likely impact of any proposal on ecology and environment. Cabinet member for the environment, Claire Malcolmson, has recently shared her support of the Climate and Ecology Emergency bill.

**Mole Valley Cycling Forum (MVCF) third response to Ranmore BMX/MTB bike track consultation**  
**6<sup>th</sup> June 2021**

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**Annex 1 - Mole Valley Cycling Forum (MVCF) second response to Ranmore BMX/MTB bike track consultation**  
**21 May 2021**

This second response follows on from the first response sent through by MVCF to MVDC on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2021 which is attached for information.

As of 21<sup>st</sup> May 2021, the Forum feels that the consultation on the proposed plan has been rushed without sufficient time for other options to be fully explored and developed.

It is unclear quite how MVDC has taken into account Social Value during this particular procurement process - as defined by the Local Services (Social Value) Act 2012, which requires councils to consider the social, economic and environmental impact of contracts and how they can best benefit the local community. In MVDC's vision, one of the three stated priorities is *Community Well Being – active communities and support for those who need it*. We would seek reassurance that the constitutional requirements of MVDC and best practice been followed, for example it may be in the community's best interest to seek more than one proposal before settling on the final option.

The Forum is concerned that the brevity of the consultation has limited its ability to reach an appropriate number of local relevant groups and will not provide a proper and fair reflection of the local public views. From our local contacts, we understand the consultation doesn't appear to have reached the students at Ashcombe or Priory schools. Nor does the on-line consultation form have a question relating to the residency of respondents - there appears to be no way of determining whether respondents live in or outside Mole Valley.

The 50% reduction in physical activity rate of children between 10 – 14 years\* is a ticking time bomb for our communities and authorities must do all within their power to promote continued physical activity amongst the young. It is therefore vital that local children are not priced out of this public amenity – the current proposal has the potential to price-out many of our local families. It is more than likely that children from those families will look elsewhere to build their own 'free' informal cycle tracks which will ultimately take MVDC resources to remove and remediate.

As no physical work can be carried out on site until at least October 2021, due to bird nesting season, the Forum sees no reason to rush any decision on the location's future. The Forum therefore proposes the council reassess the location and provide residents with a full and adequate consultation to include the following options:

- kept as is, maintained by volunteers;
- upgraded (with the use of council CIL money) with a low maintenance surface;
- leased as a commercial facility, whereby the site upgrade, management and upkeep is put out to tender, ideally with more than one proposal being considered and 5 year business plans reviewed and assessed.

The following should be considered and preserved as part of any development:

- free or near free access to local children;
- any upgrade must respect the natural habitat that has developed (including the nightingale and roman snail populations)
- must not erect a fence around the area
- must retain vehicle access to the community orchard

*\*Sebastian Coe, Radio 4 Today programme 20<sup>th</sup> May 2021*

**Mole Valley Cycling Forum (MVCF) third response to Ranmore BMX/MTB bike track consultation**  
**6<sup>th</sup> June 2021**

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**Annex 2 - Mole Valley Cycling Forum (MVCF) first response to Ranmore BMX/MTB bike track consultation**  
**22<sup>nd</sup> March 2021**

Mole Valley Cycling Forum (MVCF) is extremely concerned to recently learn about the potential loss of the Ranmore BMX/MTB park as free-to-use community asset for local youngsters. We would have appreciated earlier consultation about this initiative which we understand has been under consideration by MVDC for some time.

We understand that the proposal for the development of the BMX/MTB track at Ranmore by Trail Academy will be considered at the Cabinet meeting tomorrow. We feel that potentially removing open access on community-owned land needs particular and careful consultation with existing users and other key stakeholders who may be impacted by change of ownership of the facility.

This place is an important local facility for children, allowing them to interact and develop social skills, get exercise and have a place to gather to focus on bike riding and handling skills. We believe it is vitally important to maintain this ethos. In a conversation that I had yesterday with a mother and her young son, who is a user of the facility, it was emphasised by the mother that the knowledge of knowing where to find her son and to keep him safe from cycling on local roads (which she considered to be dangerous) were particularly important benefits of the facility. The space and freedom this place gives is a priceless community asset.

We are in full agreement with the concern expressed in a MVDC briefing document which states that: ***"...a key risk is around accessibility to the site. It is currently free to use and available to all....."*** and that ***"The proposal will make it a paid for service, and therefore there is a risk that it becomes inaccessible to some people, as well as being a potential reputational risk."***

Loss of open access to the track would be a loss of public amenity at a time where we need to encourage people to cycle more. This is not likely to happen if they are priced out of local facilities. We understand the Trail Academy is proposing an annual membership of £90/year, an 'after school' pass of £3.50 or a full day pass to be £10/day. This may well prove to be a deterrent for some and we fully concur and support the point expressed in the MVDC document that- ***"We would not want the cost to restrict usage and it is vital that ..... the site remains accessible e.g. through providing discounted rates for families on low income."***

Development of the site will encourage riders from more distant locations which in turn will lead to increased traffic with subsequent impact on the limited parking available to the walkers and allotment holders. In the summer, the car park can be completely full. Other stakeholder concerns will also need to be addressed eg: How will access to the Community Orchard be maintained?

Ends