

Glenlivet Estate

Results of Proposed Glenlivet Mountain Bike Trails Public Consultation

Vicky Hilton, Countryside Manager, Glenlivet Estate

December 2009

Background

Today, Scotland is renowned as one of the top mountain biking destinations in the world, and local mountain bike projects, such as Laggan Wolftrax, have been the drivers for economic growth and regeneration of remote rural areas. With this in mind, The Crown Estate is looking at the feasibility of developing such a centre at Glenlivet Estate.

Feasibility Study

A top UK mountain bike trail designer was commissioned to undertake a feasibility study for a mountain bike centre at Glenlivet. This was funded by The Crown Estate with assistance from Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE). Following several field visits to Glenlivet to assess the potential of the estate's landscape the designers produced a feasibility study document.

During the field visits the designers assessed the potential of a number of different areas of the estate for suitability for mountain biking, namely;

- The Lecht – Tomintoul linear route
- Glenmulliach forest
- Carn Daimh and Cairn Meilich forests
- Cnoc Fergan forest
- Cairn Muldonich forest

In order to create a commercially viable centre, appealing to mountain bikers, sympathetic to the landscape and also meeting the objectives of supporting the local economy they concluded that the only viable site that should be investigated further at this initial stage was the Carn Daimh and Cairn Meilich plantation.

The feasibility study produced thus concentrated on providing further detail of a proposed bike centre/hub location and three proposed mountain bike routes in this forest area.

Public Consultation

A community consultation was carried out during November 09 to allow the public an opportunity to see the proposed plans as suggested by the feasibility study and to feedback their thoughts and comments.

1. Consultation methods

A brief summary of the project, a summary of the plans and questionnaire sheet were produced which was widely distributed through the following methods;

1.1. Public consultation evening

An open evening was held on Wednesday 4th November at the Glenlivet Estate Office and Information Centre in Tomintoul between 7-9pm. This was widely publicised throughout the local community by; posters displayed on all the local notice boards / shops during the preceding month, email notification to those on the Thistledown community distribution list

and a listing in the Northern Scot newspaper the preceding week. In addition direct invitations were sent to the representatives of the Glenlivet & Inveravon and Kirkmichael & Tomintoul community associations. Open invitations were also aired at the Crown Estate community liaison meeting and the Glenlivet and the Cairngorms marketing group business meeting.

During the open evening plans were displayed showing the proposed location of the bike centre / hub and routes in relation to Tomintoul and also detailed plans of each of the three proposed mountain bike routes, in addition to the feasibility study being available. Several members of staff were on hand throughout the evening to answer questions and explain the proposals, namely; Andrew Wells (Head of Countryside Management, The Crown Estate), Vicky Hilton (Countryside Manager, Glenlivet, The Crown Estate), Jamie Evans-Freke (Land agent, Smiths Gore), William Hawes (Assistant land agent, Smiths Gore). The summary plans and a questionnaire were available to take away.

1.2. Personal consultations

Preceding the public community consultation evening, personal visits were made by estate staff to those residents and tenant farmers who would in some way be directly affected by the proposals.

At each meeting the plans for the proposed centre and routes were explained and plans and a questionnaire left with each party for their feedback. They were also invited to attend the consultation evening.

1.3. Further availability

The plans were left on display at the Glenlivet Estate Office and Information centre throughout November, along with the summary and questionnaire available to take away.

The summary, plans and questionnaire were also available to download from the Glenlivet Estate website along with the feasibility study document.

1.4. Closing date

Due to the timings of the local community association meetings and further publicity of the project created by an article in the Press & Journal newspaper after the consultation evening, the original deadline for returning questionnaires and feedback was extended to the 30th November.

2. Results

2.1. Attendance

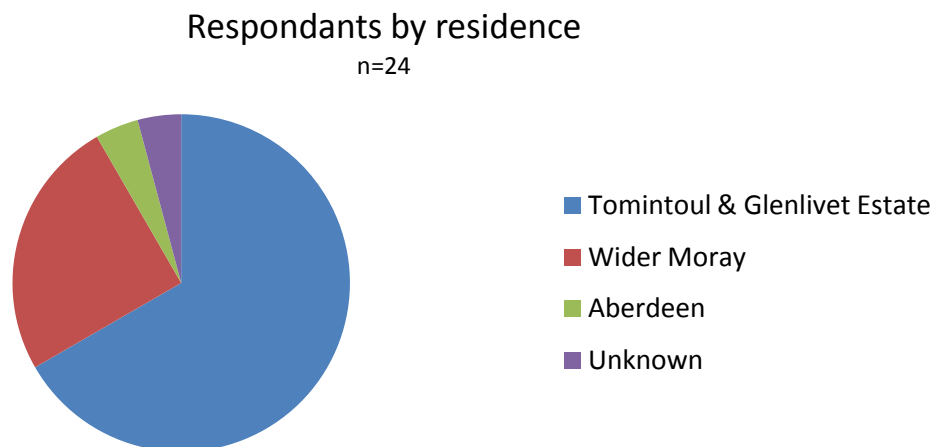
Around 30 people attended the consultation open evening, discussions were had with four residents/tenants and a further seven people requested further information either by dropping into the estate office to discuss the plans, or via phone calls and emails.

2.2. Responses

A total of 24 written responses were received, the majority on the questionnaire form with others being submitted via emails.

3. Analysis of results

3.1. Demographic spread



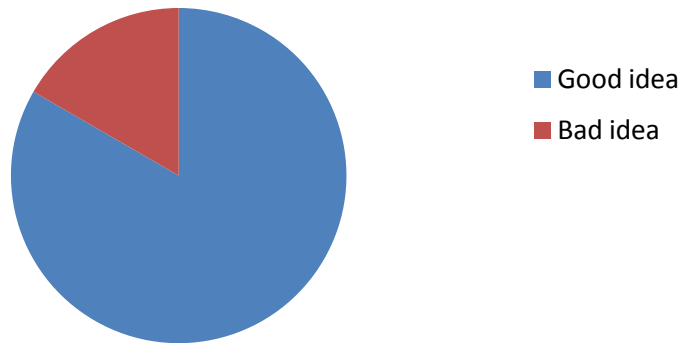
3.2. Support for mountain bike centre

Of the respondents 83% thought that in principal a mountain bike centre was a good idea. Reasons cited for this included; “more mountain biking provision for area, great weekend trip in addition to the Lecht, opportunity for Tomintoul to breathe life into village, a growing sport, development and benefit for area, bring visitors to area, increase economy of area, good central location in Scotland” and “an added attraction to area”.

Reasons cited by the 17% that thought a mountain bike centre was not a good idea included; “already existing cycle trails on estate and at the Lecht” and “threaten the enjoyment of walkers”.

In principal, is a mountain bike centre a good idea?

n=24

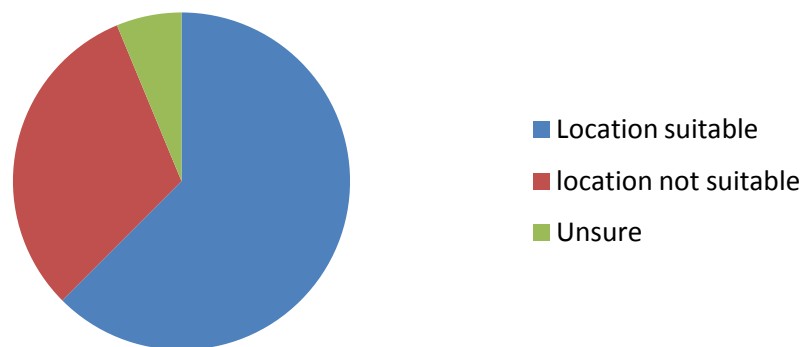


3.3. Proposed Location

Of the respondents that commented on the proposed location, 63% thought the location was appropriate, 31% thought that it was inappropriate and 6% were unsure.

Appropriateness of proposed location

n=16



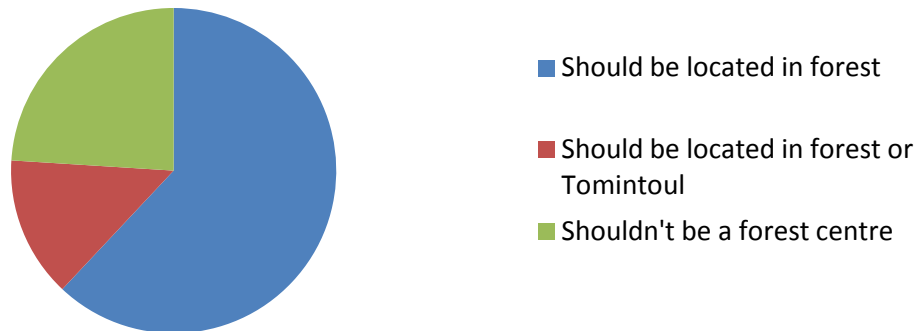
Reasons given by respondents included; Suitable location – “not too far from Tomintoul, great views, good terrain, many of proposed routes already exist”; Not suitable – “poor road access especially in winter, potential wildlife disturbance, potential deer displacement, litter, spoil remoteness of area/for holiday guests, deteriorate standard of living for people in glen due to increased traffic and noise”, and “convert quiet walkers paradise into dangerous race track”. Those that were unsure gave reasons as “environmental assessment required”.

3.4. Visitor Centre / Hub

The proposals suggest that a bike visitor centre / hub be situated in the forest to provide information and business opportunities such as a cafe and bike hire. The majority of respondents (62%) thought there should be a centre with business opportunities at the location, with a further 14% believing there should be business opportunities either at the location or in Tomintoul. Only a quarter of respondents (24%) thought that there shouldn't be a centre located in the forest.

Response to suggested forest visitor centre

n=21



Several respondents were strongly in favour of a forest centre, citing other examples of mountain bike centres that have been successful in attracting visitors due to a centre/cafe, other comments in favour of a centre included “more work opportunities” and “essential for economic benefit to area”. Those respondents not in favour gave reasons for this as “would be near national walking trail, would not be financially viable, too far from Tomintoul to be of direct benefit to business community, detract from wildness & remoteness of area” and “should be sited in village”.

3.5. View on the three proposed trail routes

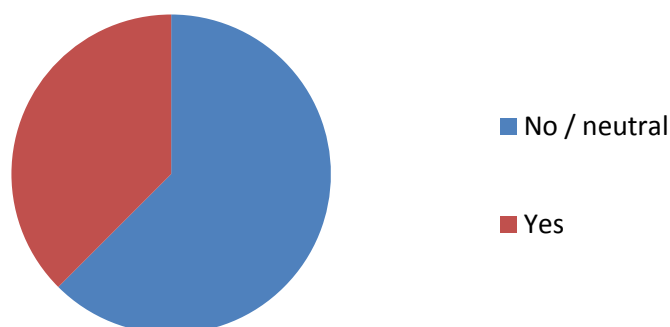
Half of the respondents (50%) didn't comment on the proposed trail routes or gave a neutral response such as “looks fine”. One third of people (33%) commented on what the riding ability of the trail should be, with comments such as “should be technically challenging, should be suitable for all ages & abilities” and “has to be a good mixture of trails”. Objections to the routes were raised by 17% of respondents with the issues raised being; “conflict with farmland, potential disturbance to wildlife, too much in a small area, will deter walkers” and “attempting to tame the wilderness”.

3.6. Other potential issues

Respondents were invited to indicate if they could foresee any other problems/issues with the proposals.

Any other issues with proposals?

n=24



Half the respondents (50%) indicated 'no other problems', while 12.5% suggested 'neutral problems' such as "a campsite would be helpful, funding could be problematic" and "objections from people who are unwilling to accept change". Concerns were raised from the remaining 37.5% of respondents, specifically identifying; "poor road access, lack of infrastructure, conflict with holiday cottage, disturbance to wildlife and remote area, affect sporting use, no access for emergency vehicles" and "create scar on landscape".

4. Conclusion

Overall the respondents can be grouped into the following categories;

- Totally in favour – all feedback comments totally positive
- Generally in favour– feedback in favour of proposals but some concern mentioned over e.g. access road, potential wildlife disturbance etc
- Generally against – majority of comments against proposals, but some positive notes
- Totally against – all comments totally negative and against proposals

