

ITEM NO: 12

SUBJECT: MOUNTAIN BIKE TRACK PLANNING - KNAPSACK RESERVE

FILE NO: F05689 - 10/181145

Management Plan Link

Principal Activity: Social - Looking After People

Service: Sport and Recreation

Project: Provide and maintain walking trails and lookouts

Recommendations:

1. *That the Council receives the report and notes the information;*
 2. *That the Council endorses formalisation of the existing track network in Knapsack Reserve for use by mountain bikes, subject to an environmental assessment as shown in Enclosure 1 – Knapsack Reserve Maps (Map 1);*
 3. *That in order to improve environmental sustainability, sections of the existing track network be closed and restored, and new sections constructed as shown in Enclosure 1 – Knapsack Reserve Maps (Map 2); and*
 4. *That the Council endorses the construction of the downhill track marked Option A, subject to environmental assessment, and restoration of the existing downhill track, as both shown in Enclosure 1 – Knapsack Reserve Maps (Map 3).*
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Report by Group Manager, BM City Services:**Reason for report**

The purpose of this report is to obtain the Council's endorsement of the Knapsack Reserve Mountain Bike Plan (MTBP).

Background

At the Ordinary Meeting of the Council of 16 March 2010, the Council resolved:

1. *That Council closes all downhill mountain bike tracks on the eastern escarpment and adjoining ridges;*
2. *That Council moves to rehabilitate all closed tracks utilising local bush care groups and volunteers as a priority;*
3. *That Council liaises with NSW Police in order to enforce track closures;*
4. *That Council works with local riders to find a new location for down hill bike riding in a non-environmentally sensitive and non-residential area. That a report comes to Council on this issue within three months and the report considers funding support from user groups; and*

5. *That Council conducts community consultation, including but not limited to, public meetings, letter box drops, online discussion and liaison with Councillors and residents about any new location for downhill bike riding.*

[Minute No: 103]

At the Ordinary Meeting of the Council of 29 June 2010, the Council resolved:

1. *That the Council receive the report and note the information;*
2. *That the Council endorses further assessment and consultation with stakeholders concerning the formalisation of mountain bike tracks in Knapsack Reserve, as provided for in the existing Knapsack Reserve Plan of Management; and*
3. *That the Council receives a further report by 12 October 2010 addressing the assessment of tracks, consultation outcomes and proposed usage strategy at Knapsack Reserve.*

[Minute No: 284]

At the Ordinary Meeting of the Council of 21 September 2010, the Council resolved:

That the Council receives a report by 23 November 2010 addressing the assessment of walking and bicycle tracks at Knapsack Reserve including consultation outcomes and proposed usage strategy.

[Minute No: 425]

At the Ordinary Meeting of the Council of 2 November 2010, the Council resolved:

That the Council receives a report regarding the outcomes of regeneration efforts at former downhill trails at Blaxland Gardens, East Blaxland with a view to measuring the success of environmental reparation after twelve months of such effort.

[Minute No: 502]

At the Ordinary Meeting of the Council of 2 November 2010, the Council resolved:

1. *That a report comes to Council, regarding staff liaison with Blue Mountains Off Road Cyclists regarding an alternative alignment for the proposed downhill mountain bike trail at Knapsack reserve (as opposed to the existing alignments which have been identified as unsustainable by the international mountain bike association during a recent review), as soon as practicable;*
2. *That, concurrent with a report coming to the Council regarding staff liaison with Blue Mountains Off Road Cyclists, regarding an alternative alignment for the proposed down-hill bicycle trail at Knapsack [Park] Reserve, a re-assessment of the proposed track alignment be undertaken with guidance from the most recent vegetation mapping report, viz "Scheduled Vegetation Verification in Local Environmental Plan 1991 Area of Blue Mountains Local Government Area", by P & J Smith Ecological Consultants, September 2010;*
3. *That should the proposed downhill track pass through Shale/Sandstone Transition Forest which is listed as an endangered ecological community under both NSW and Commonwealth legislation, a Species Impact Statement on the*

proposed track alignment is prepared in accordance with NSW legislation, for referral to the Federal Minister for the Environment for approval, under Commonwealth legislation; and

4. *That the report, currently proposed for the Council Meeting of 23 November 2010, is delayed to the Council Meeting of 14 December 2010 to include points 1-3.*

[Minute No: 503]

Mountain Bike (MTB) riding is growing in popularity and there is limited provision for this sport in the Blue Mountains or the Sydney metropolitan area. The increased participation and development of unauthorised tracks to support the various disciplines of the sport are leading to increased social and environmental conflict. In 2009, track networks at Nichols Pde, Mt Riverview and Old Bathurst Road, East Blaxland, some of which have had a history of use spanning many years, were closed to riding by the Council because of environmental and social impacts.

The Council in its Nature Based Recreation Strategy 2005-2015 recognised a need to identify and formalise suitable sites for MTB riding. Council's Knapsack Reserve Plan of Management made provision for the use of existing tracks for cross country MTB riding and also identified a downhill (DH) track. However, the existing DH track is of low technical and environmental standard and is seldom used. There are otherwise no approved sites for downhill riding on any public land within the Blue Mountains LGA.

In response to the aforementioned resolutions, Council undertook further assessment and consultation with stakeholders concerning the formalisation of MTB tracks in Knapsack Reserve, as provided for in the existing Knapsack Reserve Plan of Management. This enabled the preparation of this report addressing the assessment of tracks, consultation outcomes and proposed usage strategy at Knapsack. This report also provides information on the outcomes of regeneration efforts at former downhill tracks, staff liaison with Blue Mountains Off Road Cyclists regarding an alternative alignment for the proposed DH track at Knapsack reserve, and the environmental impact assessment process. A summary of issues associated with the above points is provided below in Table 1.

Knapsack Reserve Mountain Bike Plan

The Knapsack Reserve Mountain Bike Plan identifies a potential cross country riding circuit and two options for a DH track. The cross country circuit is 6.5 km in length and utilises both single track (one rider/walker width) and double track (typically vehicle width) and is shown in Map 1, Enclosure 1 – Knapsack Reserve Maps. There is an existing DH track that is unsustainable and the MTBP identifies two alternative options that are more sustainable. Option A is 1.41 km in length and is the preferred route being technically superior and more consistent with the requirements of the sport in terms of length and gradient. Option B is 1.17 km in length. DH track Options A and B are shown in Map 3, Enclosure 1 - Knapsack Reserve Maps. The proposal for both the cross country and DH tracks involves the closure/reduction in width and remediation of tracks as well as the construction of new more sustainable sections of track. These sections of track are shown in Map 3, Enclosure 1 – Knapsack Reserve Maps.

The MTBP was prepared by a local stakeholder group, the Blue Mountains Off-Road Cyclists (BMORC), in consultation with Council. Further detail on Council's liaison with BMORC in preparing this Plan is provided further on in this report. The Plan was presented to stakeholder groups and at a public meeting held at Blaxland Library on 19 October 2010 where comment was sought on the Plan. A summary of the issues raised by stakeholders

and individuals at the meeting or through written correspondence along with Council's response is provided below.

Environmental Impact and Assessment

The Plan involves the closure of 1526 linear metres (lm) of cross country track and 270 lm of DH track for environmental outcomes. A further 1615 lm of track will have its width reduced. Together this will achieve 2010 m² or 0.2 ha of track being restored to bushland, the majority of which is a threatened ecological community (TEC).

It should be noted that the listing of a vegetation assemblage as a TEC does not imply that any of the species contained within it are threatened, but only that the overall vegetation grouping has a limited representation.

This Plan requires construction of new sections of cross country track in alignments that are more sustainable plus new sections associated with the DH track options. Whilst this will provide some environmental benefits it will also involve the modification of vegetation. The cross country alignments plus DH track Option A will result in 955 m² of vegetation being modified. The new alignments plus DH track Option B will result in 831 m² of vegetation being modified. This equates to approximately 30m by 30m or 0.1ha of vegetation modified, which is all a TEC.

Overall the Knapsack Reserve MTBP will achieve a net gain in the extent of TEC within the Reserve. As it is proposed, the new sections of track will impact on Threatened Ecological Communities, however the impact is very unlikely to be determined as significant due to the relatively small area modified and net gain in TEC as a result of the restoration of tracks to bushland.

The construction of any new trail would need to be assessed and approved under Part 5 of the EP&A Act and does not require Development Approval due to SEPP (Infrastructure) 2007 provisions. Council would prepare a Review of Environmental Factors (REF) that includes an assessment of whether an activity will have a significant impact on threatened species or ecological communities. Council is only required to prepare a Species Impact Statement (SIS) or refer the activity to the Commonwealth if in preparing the REF it is determined that the activity is likely to have a significant impact on a threatened species or ecological community.

The following table outlines the summary of issues associated with MTB activities at Knapsack Reserve:

Issue	Summary	Comment/Response
1	Existing vegetation impacts associated with unauthorised trail construction/maintenance	Reserve/MTB signage will include a Code of Conduct that states environmental values of the site and that no unauthorised clearing is to take place.
		Introduction of Knapsack Reserve Trackcare days will deliver Council staff supervised management actions and should reduce the incidence of unauthorised vegetation impacts.
2.1	Potential vegetation impacts associated with improved trail alignment and DH trail construction	The construction of new tracks will involve removal of the groundcover, removal of some shrubs but no tree removal and is therefore modifying the vegetation structure as opposed to clearing.

Issue	Summary	Comment/Response
2.2		Loss or modification of TEC's was not supported by a section of the community.
2.3		General support was shown for the improvement of existing trails and the construction of new trails kept to a minimum.
2.4		Reserve/MTB signage will include a Code of Conduct that states environmental values of the site and that no unauthorised clearing is to take place.
2.5		As discussed above, the Plan will result in the modification of 0.1 ha of TEC, offset by restoration of 0.2 ha of tracks to bushland, achieving overall a 0.1 ha gain in the extent of vegetation within the reserve.
3.1	Threatened Ecological communities and the outcomes of recent vegetation verification	Council mapped the City's vegetation in 1999/2000 to inform the development of LEP 2005 and since then there has been further revision and refinement of the description of vegetation types, particularly those threatened ecological communities associated with the shale landscapes in the lower mountains. With regard to this, Council engaged local consultants to undertake further vegetation verification in preparation of the revision of LEP 1991.
3.2		As expected, sections of vegetation along the Eastern Escarpment subject to field verification were found to support far more TEC than had previously been mapped. In the case of Knapsack Reserve, Council's vegetation mapping identified 16 ha of Sydney Turpentine-Ironbark Forest. The verification process has identified 72 ha of Shale-Sandstone Transitional Forest and 13 ha of Sydney Turpentine-Ironbark Forest. This represents a five fold increase in the area of TEC in the reserve and a large proportion of the existing and proposed track network is now within a TEC.
3.3		The proposal will result in the modification of 0.1 ha of vegetation and the recent vegetation process has identified 84 ha of TEC in the reserve therefore the impact is minimal.
4.1	Environmental Impact Assessment, Species Impact Statements and referral to NSW and Commonwealth agencies.	The activity proposed is not likely to be deemed significant as the extent of proposed closures and restoration exceeds the area of vegetation modified. In the event the proposal is deemed not significant Council will not be required to prepare an SIS but will still refer the REF to the Commonwealth for consideration and concurrence so as to ensure transparency and an opportunity for peer review.
5.1	Existing and potential trail erosion	A substantial network of single and double track exists in Knapsack Reserve. The majority are in a fair to moderate state. A small proportion are degraded due to poor construction, user impacts or are located in inappropriate localities such as lower in a drainage line. A proportion is duplicate or unnecessary. The MTBP has identified a number of tracks that could be closed and several sections of poorly located track that needs

Issue	Summary	Comment/Response
5.2		re-alignment to reduce impacts. Council currently expends in Knapsack Reserve approximately \$5,000 per annum from the Environmental Levy Degraded Lands Program to improve soil conservation on retained tracks and close and restore others to bushland.
5.3		Further active management of the existing trail network gained through volunteer contributions is likely to achieve a net reduction in erosion from existing tracks.
6.1	Resident impacts associated with MTB rider parking	Promotion of Glenbrook Oval as the main parking area (external websites, such as Central Tablelands MTB Club, already promote Glenbrook Oval as parking and access Knapsack reserve).
6.2		Council will improve delineation of Front to Kerb parking and designation of the loop parking area at Lovers walk as a 15 minute parking zone which provides off street parking for shuttling DH riders and the visual impact is less as there is vegetation between the loop parking and houses.
7.1	The existing Old Bathurst Road DH trail is a technically superior trail compared to that proposed at Knapsack.	This position is supported by MTB user groups. BM Conservation Society supports further investigation of Old Bathurst Rd and comparison to Knapsack in terms of potential impacts on the environment.
7.2	The Old Bathurst Rd track is considered to be world class, and improved design and construction may involve less environmental impact than construction of the proposed trail at Knapsack.	As the sport increases in popularity there is likely to be increased interest in re-opening this popular trail and with only passive management the site may be subject to unauthorised use in future.
8.1	User groups stewardship and partnership programs with Council	Adoption of the MTBP will promote the opportunity for user group stewardship where users contribute to management activities. Trackcare days have previously occurred at Old Bathurst Rd and based on previous support is estimated to be 300 days of volunteer labour valued at \$45,000 over 3 years.
8.2		Stewardship promotes a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the site and other users and this is often expressed through user group policing of inappropriate actions being undertaken by individuals thus reducing conflict.
9.1	User conflict	Adoption of the MTBP provides all user group a clear indication of permissible activities within Knapsack Reserve.
9.2		Knapsack Reserve is of sufficient size that interaction between riders and walkers is likely to be minimal.
9.3		Reserve/MTB signage will include a Code of Conduct that identifies responsible riding practices and provides mapping showing the location of double and single

Issue	Summary	Comment/Response
		track.
10	Pay for use opportunities	If a formalised track network was to be approved and popularity of the site increased there would be the potential for organised MTB events in the future. If approved by Council there would be the opportunity to recoup management costs through the licensing of events. It is not, however, feasible to require a fee for use from riders using the site on an individual basis.
11	Economic benefits to local business	MTB riders contribute significantly to small business in Glenbrook and further promotion of the locality as a destination for riders will benefit business.
12	Inter-city connectivity	A lead stakeholder group, Mountain Bike Australia, expressed a need for an Inter-city MTB track between Penrith and Blue Mountains and the opportunity for it to be incorporated into the Knapsack Reserve MTBP. MTB Australia identified benefits including its use for commuting as well as reduced reliance of vehicles to access MTB tracks in the reserve. Whilst the outcomes are supported by Council it is not within the scope of the Plan to consider as a large proportion of an inter-city track would fall both outside the Reserve and the City.
13	Impacts on cultural heritage sites	The well documented European heritage values of Knapsack Reserve, which were associated with the crossing and development of the Blue Mountains will not be impacted by the proposal. Less is known about of the Aboriginal heritage values of the Reserve. The preparation of the Review of Environmental Factors will consider Aboriginal heritage values and the Plan amended to avoid impacts on such values.

The implementation of the Knapsack Reserve MTBP and the response to issues described in Table 1 will ensure a more sustainable recreational opportunity for MTB riders and the community at large in the lower mountains.

Restoration of Former Downhill Tracks on the Eastern Escarpment

The closure and restoration of the Nichols Parade DH track was undertaken proactively by Council due to environmental and social impacts and was completed in March 2010. At the 16 March 2010 meeting, the Council resolved to close all downhill bike tracks on the Eastern escarpment (Minute No. 103). In response, Council installed "No Bike Riding" signs at Nichols Parade and the Old Bathurst Road (OBR) tracks in April 2010.

In July 2010 both the closure and restoration of the OBR tracks commenced. Restoration works at this site are planned over the next three years with approximately 25% complete. There remains significant areas of degradation at this site associated with 4WD access tracks and downhill bike tracks that are still to be addressed. The DH tracks on the northern side of OBR have not yet received any restoration works. Further track closure and restoration works are programmed for this financial year to undertake priority drainage works and continue track restoration at the OBR site under Council's degraded land program and are expected to be ongoing for several years.

With regard to the efficacy of works undertaken, Council staff inspected the closed DH tracks in November 2010. The greater majority of the restoration efforts appear undisturbed with accumulation of leaf litter occurring. Brush-matting has been removed from a small section

of closed track. However there was no obvious evidence to suggest the sites are being used for DH riding.

Sustainability Assessment

Effects	Positive	Negative
Environmental	Implementation of the MTBP, including track remediation and improved alignment, promotion of a code of practice and increase user stewardship will reduce existing environmental impacts associated with MTB riding. This outcome is expected to be sufficient to offset any impacts associated with the increased usage of existing tracks.	Improved track alignment and the construction of a more sustainable DH track will require minor vegetation loss. Some affected vegetation will be NSW and Commonwealth listed Endangered Ecological Communities
Social	Council promotes cycling and mountain bike riding as legitimate recreational and sporting pursuits, as well as environmentally friendly and a healthy activity. Its participants cover a wide age spectrum from children to the elderly. The provision of more cycling opportunities, including those such as cross country riding in bushland supports healthy living and engagement with the natural environment. The introduction of the MTBP and promotion of a code of practice may also lead to reduced conflict.	Potentially increased demand for parking may affect residential amenity, however improved parking management and the promotion of parking at Glenbrook Oval may be sufficient to negate any impacts.
Economic	Glenbrook is already a popular destination for local and regional MTB riders with the Oaks Firetrail located within riding distance of the train station and shops. Riders make a significant economic contribution to small business at Glenbrook. Adoption of the MTBP will enhance the locality as a destination for MTB riders further stimulating the local economy. If Knapsack proves a valuable resource for MTB riding then the opportunity to hold formal MTB events may be possible and Council would be able to recoup management costs through licensing of event facilitators.	Active management will involve a financial and in-kind cost (staff time) to Council.
Governance	Adoption of the MTBP provides clear management direction and allows active management of the activity and improved regulatory enforcement.	None.

Financial implications for the Council

The financial cost to Council in funding the implementation of the MTBP over a 3 year period is \$38,000 sourced from existing Bushland Management and Environmental Levy operating budgets. Council will be required to commit a further 36 staff days towards management and supervision of Trackcare days and expects to receive 300 person days in volunteer labour valued at \$45,000.

Mountain biking is a growing sport with high regional demand. As such, there is a strong opportunity to attract external funding that may reduce or eliminate some direct financial cost to Council. The significant volunteer labour contribution further enhances this potential to gain external funding. It would be Council’s preference to fund the MTBP through external funding. If this can not be achieved then other existing environmental management programs will have to be delayed or have reduced budgets for a 3 year period in order to fund the MTBP.

At the completion of the three year program of works the Council will have an improved standard of trail network in Knapsack Reserve. At this point, Council’s direct financial costs should reduce to approximately \$2,000 in materials/contractors and 6 staff days per annum. These costs would be met by the recurrent Bushland Management operational budget. Volunteer Trackcare days would be anticipated to continue 2 days per annum.

Action	Cost	Source of Funding
Undertake Review of Environmental Effects	\$1,050	BMCC staff time (3 days)
Track Signage	\$8,000	BMCC operational budget
Management of cross country trails (inc. stabilisation of retained tracks, closure and rehabilitation of sections and construction of new sections as shown in Enclosed maps)	\$6,300 labour \$15,000 materials/contractors \$22,500 volunteer labour	BMCC staff time (based on 3 staff attending two Trackcare days per annum for three years) BMCC operational /Environment Levy budgets (existing expenditure) Volunteer contribution to Trackcare days (based on 2 days/annum for 3 years assuming participation of 25 persons/day 6 hrs/day @\$25/hr)
Management of Downhill Trails (inc. construction of Option A and closure and rehabilitation of existing trail)	\$6,300 labour \$15,000 materials/contractors \$22,500 volunteer labour	BMCC staff time (based on 3 staff attending two Trackcare days per annum for three years) Grant funding preferred however if unsuccessful BMCC operation /Environment Levy Volunteer contribution to Trackcare days (based on 2 days/annum for 3 years assuming participation of 25 persons/day 6 hrs/day @\$25/hr)

Legal and risk management issues for the Council

There are no legal or risk management issues for the Council.

External consultation

Extensive external consultation was carried out in preparation and public presentation of the MTBP and is summarised below:

- Council staff and members of BMORC met on site at Knapsack to allow Council to clearly define Council issues and environmental constraints prior to mapping of trails;
- BMORC members met on site with Mountain Bike Australia (MTBA) staff who specialise in trail construction in order to define the most sustainable downhill route;
- A further on site meeting was held between Council staff and BMORC to discuss issues post mapping;
- Council staff met with members of Blue Mountains Conservation Society where Council presented the MTBP;

- Invitations to attend the Public Meeting were directly mailed to 16 residents closest to prominent reserve entry points;
- A Public Meeting to present the MTBP was advertised for two weeks in the Gazette and was held at Blaxland Library on 19th October 2010. This meeting included an open discussion session where individuals could raise issues with Council and was attended by 34 individuals;
- Council liaised with the Commonwealth EPBC Act Compliance Section to confirm the existing environmental assessment and regulatory process associated with impacts on threatened ecological communities; and
- Council received four written submissions, which included two submissions provided by the Blue Mountains Conservation Society.

Conclusion

The Knapsack Reserve Mountain Bike Plan proposes the formalisation of a 6.5km cross country circuit and identifies two possible downhill tracks that will involve new track construction. The Plan’s adoption by the Council will allow the further development of a partnership between mountain bike riders and Council that will achieve more sustainable mountain bike use of Knapsack Reserve. The construction of new tracks with the aim of reducing environmental impacts and to provide a downhill track will result in the modification of 0.1ha of vegetation offset by 0.2ha of track restored to bushland through closures. The downhill track Option A is preferred by riders, being a technically superior track that better meets the requirements of the sport.

ATTACHMENTS/ENCLOSURES

1	Enclosure 1 - Knapsack Reserve Maps	10/187442	Enclosure
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