

Report for Information

Report to Mousehold Heath Conservators
12th September 2008

Item

8

Report of Head of Community Services

Subject Mountain Biking Activity on Mousehold Heath – interim
update

Purpose

To update the conservators on the situation regarding the illegal use of the Heath by mountain bikers.

Recommendations

That the Conservators note the contents of this report.

Financial Consequences

There are no financial consequences associated with this report.

Corporate Objective/Service Plan Priority

The report helps to achieve the corporate objective to provide safe and healthy neighbourhoods.

Contact Officer

Simon Meek - Green Spaces Manager

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Background Documents

None

Report

Introduction

1. Cycling on Mousehold Heath has taken place for many years unchallenged, so long as cyclists did not cause a nuisance and danger to other visitors, or damage the fabric of the site.
2. In more recent years an increase in the popularity of mountain biking and BMX riding has seen an increase in the impact that it has on the heath and other users.
3. As mountain bikers particularly like to use a rugged terrain with steep drops and hollows, their use of an area of the heath to the north east of the Fountain ground, on the south eastern edge of Mousehold Heath, south of Valley Drive has been tolerated historically as it was not considered to be causing a problem. (See Map – Appendix 1). The issue has been raised at previous Conservators meetings with a request that action be taken to remove the bikers from the area perhaps by the Council providing an alternative site adjacent to Mousehold Heath.
4. The then single Mousehold Warden and Neighbourhood Wardens were asked to support the Conservators in removing the BMX riders from the site.

Recent Events

5. At the end of May and the beginning of June 2008 a small number of reports were received in relation to the use of the heath for mountain and BMX bike riding in relation to the damage being caused to the site and altercations with the riders.
6. At the management sub group meeting held on 21 May 2008, the issue of mountain and BMX bikes on the heath was discussed, which included discussion on providing an alternative area for these activities, on land owned by Norwich City Council, north of Borrowdale Drive (See Map- Appendix 1). The area of land has previously been used as a dump for soil and has since vegetated over and been colonised by young trees.
7. The management sub group agreed that use of the site for mountain bike riding and BMX could no longer be tolerated whilst an alternative to using the heath was provided, and requested that action was taken to finally stop the activity on Mousehold Heath.
8. The Mousehold Wardens were instructed to increase patrolling of the Valley Drive area and ask people using bikes in this area to stop and leave the site and complete a log detailing every visit to the area being used for cycling.
9. The local Safer Neighbourhood Team and the Senior Neighbourhood Warden for the area were made aware of problem and asked to target patrols into the area. As there had been no calls to the police in relation to this issue they stated that it would not be a priority, nor had it been identified as a priority by the local Safer Neighbourhood Action Panel (SNAP). However, they did agree to put patrols through the area subject to available resources and explained

that they were unable to enforce the byelaws but could ask people to leave the site.

10. The Wardens hotline number was provided to the Defenders to circulate, requesting that any incidents are reported to the number so that statistics could be gathered and the area possibly identified as a hotspot.
11. Since we have increased Mousehold Warden patrols targeting patrols in the original area used by mountain bikes next to Valley Drive it has displaced the problem into the area of Chestnut Drive (See Map – Appendix 1). This is a concern, as it is not only thought to be of greater ecological value than the area at Valley Drive, but is used by a greater number of visitors.
12. Following the management sub group meeting held on 22 August 2008, the Mousehold Wardens have continued carrying out regular patrols, particularly focussing on the Chestnut Drive area, manually levelling jumps/filling in holes and speaking to the individuals concerned and moving them on. This is in an effort to prevent the continuing establishment of a second area. A log of each visit is being kept.
13. Wardens visited the Valley Drive and Chestnut Drive locations on 70 occasions between 14 June and 3 September 2008.
14. On eight occasions jumps were dismantled and holes filled in.
15. On 13 of the visits they found people mountain biking.
16. The number of individuals present riding bikes ranged from individuals up to 20 people.
17. Whenever people were encountered using the areas and asked to leave they did so, but as individuals were recognised on future visits it was evident that they were returning.

18. Comments were gathered from the cyclists when they were encountered and included:

"We will move but would be back because designated area not suitable and nowhere else to go, due to Ringland closure. Having to drive to Bedfordshire. Need decent alternative in area for their 40 members. Happy to work with council to design new area. Having a meeting with county council in week, who are supportive of their club."

"Need a decent alternative site in the area as there is no where else to bike off road." Asked about consultation and said their views should be taken into account.

"It said in the paper to say that we could ride over here, why can't we?"

"Why are you asking us to leave we have been using this area for sixteen years, can someone in authority please ring me and explain how this decision has been made when you have a public consultation outstanding regarding cycling?"

"Where do you want us to go? Do you want us to hang around street corners causing problems."

"What problems are we causing here? If you asked us to move on we would only come back."

"Who wants us to move off this site? Out of 184 acres we only want to use about 6. We respect other users we are only asking to be respected in return, is that too much to ask?"

"I would like to see you try and move us on."

"We will move on but would come back until a decent alternative site was created. Want to see results of consultation which should favour biking being allowed on part of Mousehold."

Next Steps

19. The Chair has said he will raise the profile of the issue and the perceived need for a mountain biking facility in the eastern area of the City with the relevant Executive portfolio holders.
20. The Natural Areas Officer contacted Giles Drake-Brockham, Forestry Commission operations and development manager for East Anglia, who spoke at the public meeting held as part of the Mousehold Heath Management Plan consultation, who has considerable experience of dealing with unauthorised cycling on sites. Unfortunately at the time he was contacted he was on a long period of leave which he returned from on 26 August 2008.
21. A meeting is to be arranged with Mr Drake-Brockham as a matter of urgency to visit two problem sites that the Forestry Commission currently have to understand the approaches that they are using to resolve them problem.
22. A consultation will be carried out to establish how acceptable the proposal to designate an area behind Borrowdale Drive for cycling would be, involving local residents and individuals currently riding on the heath.
23. As a result of the advice received from Mr Drake-Brockman and the feedback from the consultation a decision will then be made on suitability of the proposed area.

Mousehold Heath Conservators Committee – 12 September 2008

Item 8 – Appendix 1

Map: Location of existing mountain bike activity and potential designated area

