

Questions, and their answers on the Harcourt Mountain Bike Park From a Community meeting held on Monday 5 September 2016, and a letter received from Bronwen Willis

1. Who owns the land? Drew Henry - Land belongs to Treasury – Crown land. Drew asked: What will be done about organising ownership of the land so that proper ongoing action and maintenance can be carried out?

A: The parcel of land is Crown land, currently under the jurisdiction of the Minister for Environment, Energy and Climate Change. DELWP manage it on behalf of the Minister. The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council recommended that it be managed by Parks Victoria in their Box-Ironbark Forests and Woodlands Investigation. The future land management is yet to be decided however. At the moment it is unreserved Crown land and is managed by DELWP.

2. How is the making of the trails going to be carried out? With machines or by hand?

A: This will be determined based on the final track layout and design. However, based on the experience from other mountain bike parks built across the country it will likely be a mix of both – small machines and hand tools. Methods of construction are used as appropriate for the environment taking into account, accessibility, terrain, soil type and the track design. As a side note, typically a mountain bike track is from 300mm – 900mm wide, so the use of large machinery is not required, or considered appropriate for this type of trail development.

3. Can trails be redesigned to give access to the park by horse riders, walkers, and 4WDs?

A: The land is public land and therefore access will be open to users as per DELWP and Parks Victoria guidelines.

4. There are five entrances to the regional park: Coopers Road, McQuillans Road, Picnic Gully Road, Faraday, and one next to Suzy Barker's place (Coopers Rd). The concern is that these entrances will be cut off by the bike park.

A: It is not anticipated that the development of the mountain bike park will affect any access that is already available.

5. Some areas are not clapped out pine forest – Saunders Ridge (small hill directly behind Drew Henry's place) is in a natural state and was never planted in pines. There are magnificent rock formations with moss mats. Can trails be moved or redesigned so as not to impact on those areas where the moss mats are, which potentially contain Ballantinia Antipoda habitat? How can the cork trees be protected?

A: Extensive environmental assessments are being conducted across the entire site, including flora, fauna, biodiversity, land capability, cultural heritage and fire.

The track layout was always a draft proposal, but was developed by actually walking the site and identifying the ideal track routes. The track layout will be reviewed and developed following completion of all assessments.

The Oak Forest is excluded from this proposal, and no trails are through that area, so there will be no impact on the cork trees from this project.

DELWP will refer the proposal to the Minister for Planning under the Environment Effects Act. The Minister for Planning will determine whether the project will have a significant effect on the environment. While the decision of the Minister for Planning cannot be pre-empted all efforts will be made to minimise and mitigate any impacts through the project's design and construction methods.

6. Is the bike park going to be gated and fenced? No fence - but 5 gates are proposed to be put in.

A: There will not be a fence around the site. The final location of gates, if any are need will be determined by DELWP and emergency service agencies. Any gates that are introduced will not affect the current accessibility to The Oaks and the park itself.

7. How will motorbikes be kept out?

A: The site will be part of the land manager patrolled area, but importantly, evidence from other areas affected by trail bikes has shown that increased active participation of legal activity (such a mountain biking and bush walking) has led to a decrease in illegal motor bike activity.

8. What facilities are planned at the trail head and car park?

A: This is still to be determined. But an option is for limited facilities (some car parking and signage) at the trailhead, with the focus of facilities being provided in the Harcourt township.

9. Who will be responsible for rubbish collection/disposal and ongoing maintenance of facilities at trail head?

A: The land manager; future land management arrangements are yet to be decided.

10. Concern was expressed about the general fire risk on the mountain, e.g., if people are lighting barbecues or smoking. With more people going onto the base of the mountain there is a feeling that the fire risk is increased. How will this be prepared for?

A: The construction and installation of barbeques are not part of this proposal, and in general, mountain bike riders are not smokers! Precedents at other mountain bike parks show that trail users do not tend bring or cook a barbeque and there is no reason why it would become an activity of choice at Harcourt.

A bushfire management plan will be developed by DELWP and Parks Victoria a bushfire risk assessment has been conducted as part of the assessments.

11. How will access for fire trucks be allowed for? (Currently fire trucks cannot get in because the tracks are so bad/steep.)

A: DELWP is the responsible fire authority for Crown land. DELWP and Parks Victoria will determine which of the existing tracks are required for ongoing fire access. All DELWP/PV fire vehicles are 4WD and equipped for firefighting in rugged terrain. The area is also part of the automated despatch area that sends water bombers to a fire as soon as a fire is reported.

12. How are the trails going to be marked?

A: With signs. Likely a large sign at the trailhead showing the track network, then smaller marker posts throughout indicating track intersection and where new track start and finish.

13. A request was made for a list of potential conflicts of interest which exist for those on the Reference Group. Who are pushing this?

A: A list of the current Reference Group membership is provided at the bottom of this document.

14. When is someone going to speak to neighbouring properties? (Probably around October according to the DELWP person who rang Annette.)

A: DELWP will be commencing broader community consultation shortly and anyone who wants to know about the project will be welcome to attend. More information about this session will be provided once the details are confirmed.

15. Will there be an entry fee? (Mount Stirling – has an entry fee \$35– allows horse riding, bikes, walking, and skiing.)

A: Not anticipated

16. What is the situation with public liability insurance?

A: Public liability insurance is covered by the land manager

17. How will the trails be maintained? Concerns were expressed about weeds, erosion, native plants and wildlife. How will riders be prevented from making informal trails between the built trails?

A: It will likely be a combination of the land manager and volunteer groups.

Using examples from other mountain bike parks, and even the Goldfields Track, which runs past the mountain bike park, local users groups (mountain bike clubs and in the case of the Goldfields Track, bushwalking clubs) hold regular working bees to maintain the track. In addition, mountain bike tracks are designed and built in such a way as to not need much maintenance.

If there is a purpose built, high quality trail, experience shows mountain bikers will use those trails.

The committee appreciates there has been significant illegal track building activity in and around Maldon, but that has been done by a very small sector of mountain bike riders, known as

“downhillers”. This sector of the sport would not be interested in the offering at the Harcourt park.

The mountain bike park will appeal to “cross country/trail riders” which make up about 80% of the mountain bike fraternity, this sector respect the environment. They genuinely want to engage with and respect their environment. For them it’s not just about an exciting riding experience but also the setting. They don’t want to harm that setting.

18. Is there an environmental management plan? There is no evidence of one in the documents which are on the web. Concern was raised about impacts on native fauna, particularly wombats and echidnas; eagles and falcons nest in the area too.

A: DELWP will prepare environmental management plans both for construction and operation as part of the project’s development. Additionally, a threatened species management plan will be developed.

19. What happens when people cross into private property? Who is responsible for their safety? For example - “a dangerous property” – old quarry, large dam, cranes, chains etc

A: This is not expected to be an issue. Riders will keep to the trails. They will be at the park to ride.

They won’t be stopping their bikes to wander into an old quarry. If, when the final track layout is determined, there are concerns with the proximity to some “dangerous property”, some signs can be erected to indicate private property. Owners of adjoining properties also have the right to fence their property boundary.

20. What preparation is being made for infrastructure requirements: Market Street and Picnic Gully Road are narrow and unmade; there are no footpaths or bike paths. The speed limit on Market Street, Reservoir Rd and Picnic Gully Road is 80–100 km/hr and these are all narrow roads. Picnic Gully Road is also a narrow, dirt road. Will council commit to extra maintenance as needed to prevent deterioration, dust, and accidents on Picnic Gully Rd?

A: A traffic management plan will be developed as part of the project. This will help address concerns about speed limits, signage and access.

21. Is it possible to have a different access to the bike park other than Picnic Gully Road? All residents on this road will suffer from the extra use generated by the bike park.

A: This is the most sensible access point. But detailed in Q8 there is an option for the bulk of the facilities to be in Harcourt township itself. In this case the majority of traffic on Picnic Gully Road will be cycle, not car.

22. Can riders ride from town? Can the car park be in town?

A: See Q.s 8, 20, and 21. There are good reasons for this to occur.

23. What about upgrade of amenities, rubbish removal and signage in town?

A: This will be determined by Council as part of the trailhead development and is an important discussion point with groups such as the Harcourt Progress Association as part of the revitalisation of Harcourt in line with the master plan.

24. Was the million dollars promised by Labor before the election actually received?

A: \$1m dollars has been committed by the government and is being held until the co-funding becomes available.

25. What will happen to the orienteers? (In 2013, the Australian finals were held on the Mount).

A: As per Q.3, there will be no restriction to access for anyone that is currently allowed to use the area. The orienteers are welcome to apply to the land manager to hold any event on the site.

26. What is the veracity of the 100,000 attendance per year/ per five years? Can we have some information about usage at other mountain bike parks?

A: These figures were based on visitation to comparable mountain bike parks such as the You Yangs and Forrest in Victoria and Stromlo in the ACT. The You Yangs, as an example has an average of 125,000 users per annum and this is across mountain bikers and walkers.

27. Can we find out about World Trails and their previous work?

A: World Trail is one of the largest and most well respected trail building companies in the world. They have built over 300km of recreational trails. Their mission is to build trails that are sustainable, respect the environment and connect communities. They have built trails in highly sensitive areas such as Falls Creek and Queensland rain forests. They designed the trails to work with the environment. Examples of their work can be found on their website at <http://www.world-trail.com/>

28. Can we have a look at Forrest? Yes, HPA to organise.

A: Understand HPA is going to organise a visit

29. Does the mountain bike park — and particularly the car park and trail head — have to front right on to people's property? Can there be a buffer zone?

A: Once the final layout of tracks is determined, alterations, such as buffer zones and additional planting can be assessed.

30. What are the impacts on the rest of the mountain, and how can the historic quarrying equipment and buildings be protected?

A: This project will not impact the current area designated as the Mount Alexander Regional Park. Some of the existing older equipment is in the area of proposed black trails. These will be less visited as limited to experienced riders, and these riders won't be stopping to explore old buildings, they'll be focused on the track. In addition, as previously mentioned, these riders appreciate and respect the environment.

31. The park needs to be planned so it allows for current users. Horse riders, orienteers and walkers who currently use this area should still have access and use.
A: See Q3. In addition, it should be noted, current DEWLP and Parks Victoria guidelines state that horses can only be ridden on vehicle tracks, they are not allowed to use designated walking tracks. As the park will be under the jurisdiction of these land owners/managers access will be according to their guidelines.
32. A representative from the department driving the project should be identified and available for meetings with residents. Can the Goldfields Track Committee approach state government with this request?
A: See Q14
33. Landowners neighbouring the Mt Alexander regional park should be personally contacted by mail and invited to meet in person with that representative.
A: This will occur as part of the upcoming community consultation. Adjoining landholders are encouraged to register their interest with the DELWP Project Officer, Amanda Johnson (5430 4626 or email her at amanda.johnson@delwp.vic.gov.au) as privacy laws make it difficult for Council to release ownership details.
34. The representative and all other stakeholders should meet with Harcourt community members at a public meeting to provide clear information.
A: See Q14. DELWP will soon initiate a community consultation program. As part of the ongoing commitment to provide the best result for both the community and users they will also establish a Community Reference Group and a Technical Reference Group.
35. If no state government representative is forthcoming the Goldfields Track Committee should step up to provide as much information as has been made available to them.
A: See Q14 and Q34
36. A list of stakeholders and their interest in the park should be made transparent.
A: See Q13. In addition, DELWP are currently compiling a list of stakeholders. Any interested parties should contact Amanda Johnson (see Q33) to register.
37. An outline of the process that has occurred so far should be made publically available.
A: This will be made available as part of the consultation process.
38. Maps of the proposed trails, carparks and access roads should be made publically available.
A: These will be made available for discussion once community consultation commences. We want to be sure that the community is consulted and has an opportunity to input to the design before it is put onto the web.
39. Both the benefits and impacts of the park should be outlined.
A: A draft document will be developed and made available to the community through the consultation process. We want to make sure all the information is addressed in the development of the site.
40. How will the effected roads cope with an increase in traffic? What plans are there to maintain or upgrade them?
A: The Council has a process in place to monitor and maintain roads. Any expected changes will be addressed as part of a traffic management plan.

41. How will the Oak Forest be affected? Will people still be able to camp there? What facilities will be upgraded? Again, is there an opportunity to improve facilities here as a way of ensuring that non-riding locals benefit from the park?

A: The Oak Forest is not and never has been part of this project as it is intended that this area will be isolated from the MTB trails. We are well aware that it is valued by people who use it differently (ie for camping and weddings) and want to make sure this continues.

42. Has ongoing weed- and fire-management been costed and included in the budget?

A: DELWP has included costs for ongoing maintenance as part of the regular budget bids (this is an annual process in government). Loddon Mallee region has an annual budget for fire management that includes this area. Fire management works are undertaken as part of a risk-based program.

43. - When will the findings of the ecological and cultural heritage surveys of the area be available?

A: These findings will be made available as part of the first stage of the community consultation.

Membership of the Harcourt Mountain Bike Park Reference Group

Peter Skilbeck (Chair) Goldfields Tourism (Goldfields Track) Inc

David Bannear, Heritage Victoria, Goldfields Track

Jarrood Coote, Harcourt Landcare Group

Robyn Miller, Harcourt Progress Association

Simon Disler, Harcourt Pony Club

Hugh Finlay, Harcourt Community Representative

George Milford, Harcourt Valley Heritage & Tourist Centre

David Leathem, Mount Alexander Shire Council

Barry Floyd, Bendigo Mountain Bike Club

Nick Lewis, Castlemaine Rocky Riders

Rodney Carter, Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Clans Corporation