

Application No.
P/15/0385

Date
13th November 2015

Determining Authority
MTCBC

Proposed Development

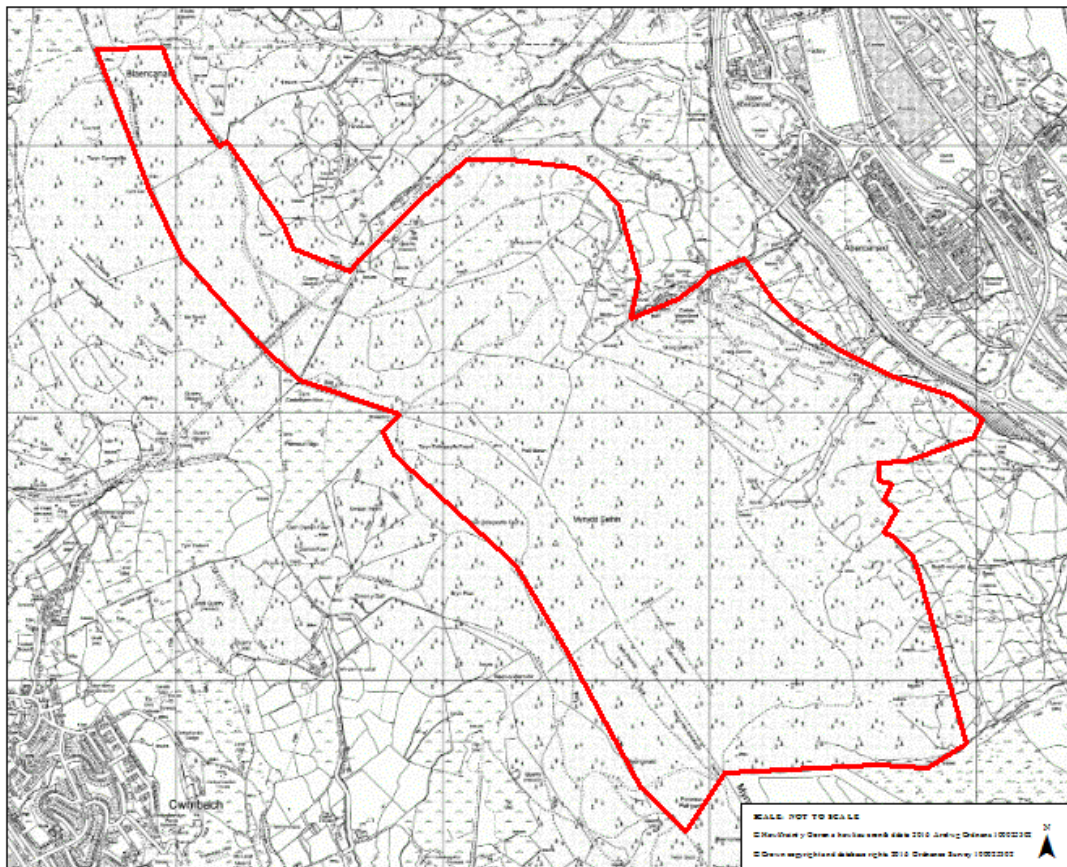
Location

Name & Address of Applicant/Agent

Construction of 23 additional mountain bike trails to expand the existing mountain bike facility

Gethin Woodland Centre
(Bike Park Wales)
Land To The West Of
A470 Between
Pentrebach And
Rhydycar
Merthyr Tydfil

Beic Parcio Cymru
F.a.o. Mr R Sorrell
Upper Cwmhir
Cwmhir Road
Jerusalem Lane



APPLICATION SITE

This application relates to a number of strips of land that are dispersed across Gethin Forest, which has been leased to Bike Park Wales (mountain bike centre) to provide a number of mountain bike trails. The site is located to the south-west of the A470(T) and the main settlement of Abercanaid with an overall area measuring approximately 2.36 hectares.

The site is situated in a countryside location which is characterised by a coniferous plantation (with areas that have been cleared as part of the operational forestry works) and broadleaved woodland areas, which are all managed by Natural Resources Wales. The approved mountain bike facility (P/12/0235) includes a visitor centre, car park and a total of 17 trails that extend across the eastern slopes of Gethin Forest.

Access to the site is via an existing forestry road off the A470(T) roundabout to the south of the site that leads to the mountain bike visitor centre and car park, which accommodates a total of 236 parking spaces.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Full planning permission is sought for the construction of 23 additional mountain bike trails to expand the existing mountain bike facility. The trails would vary between 0.25km and 3.2km in length and would vary between 0.75m and 2m wide. To provide interesting and challenging mountain bike routes, a number of features would be built into the trails, for example berms, tabletops, rollers and drop offs. The trails would largely be constructed by re-profiling the surface of the land with compacted soil and stone aggregate.

The proposed trails would extend across the eastern slopes of Gethin Forest in a similar manner to the existing trails and would be graded according to their level of difficulty for cyclists. It is proposed that the additional trails would expand the current trail offer for visitors and maintain the appeal of the mountain bike facility. Whilst the proposal includes new trails, it is noted that some of these run alongside or provide links between the existing trails.

PLANNING HISTORY

- P/16/0055 - Retention of revised car parking layout, including the provision of additional parking spaces and the erection of two wood clad huts.
Permission GRANTED on 07.04.2016
- P/13/0214 - Erection of single storey side extension to visitor centre to accommodate electrical plant room.
Permission GRANTED on 05.08.2013
- P/12/0235 - Creation of mountain bike centre comprising the erection of a single storey visitor centre building (including a cafe, office and shop), construction of seventeen forest bike trails, campsite (including 5 timber camping pods) with shower block and associated car parking and landscaping works.
Permission GRANTED on 18.10.2012

CONSULTATION

- Engineering and Traffic
Group Leader - No objection.
- Town Planning Division's
Policy & Implementation
Group Leader - No objection.

Town Planning Division's Countryside Officer	-	No objection.
Rights of Way Division	-	No objection.
Natural Resources Wales	-	No objection.

PUBLICITY

In accordance with the Town & Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Wales) Order 2012, a site notice was displayed within the vicinity of the site on the 26th November 2015 and a press notice was displayed in the local newspaper on the 2nd December 2015.

No representations were received as a result of this publicity exercise.

POLICY CONTEXT

The following policies are relevant to the determination of this application:

National planning policy

Planning Policy Wales (PPW) 8th Edition, January 2016:

Sections 5.5.1 – 5.5.3 note that the impact a development proposal may have on wildlife or the landscape is an important consideration in determining application. Where ever possible adverse effects on the environment should be avoided or acceptably minimised.

Section 8.7.1 sets out the criterion that should be considered where transport implications may occur, such as impacts on local travel demand, public transport provision, accessibility and highway safety.

Section 11.1.3 notes that the Welsh Government supports the development of sport and recreation, and the wide range of leisure pursuits which encourage physical activity. These activities are important for the well-being of children and adults and for the social economic life of Wales.

Section 11.3.1 notes that in determining planning applications for tourism development, local authorities need to consider the impact of proposals on the environment and local community.

Section 11.3.3 highlights the need to consider the effects of sport and recreation on neighbouring uses in terms of noise, light emissions, traffic generation and, in the case of larger developments, ease of access and the safety of residents, users and public.

Technical Advice Note (TAN):

- TAN 5 - Nature Conservation and Planning, September 2009
- TAN 16 - Sport, Recreation and Open Space, January 2009
- TAN18 - Transport, March 2007

Local planning policy

Merthyr Tydfil Local Development Plan (LDP) 2006-2021:

- Policy BW1 - Development strategy - Primary Growth Area
- Policy BW4 - Settlement boundaries / locational constraints
- Policy BW5 - Natural heritage
- Policy BW6 - Townscape and built heritage
- Policy BW7 - Sustainable design and place making
- Policy BW10 - Mineral safeguarding
- Policy BW12 - Development proposals and transport
- Policy BW16 - Protecting / enhancing the network of leisure facilities
- Policy AS4 - Historic landscape
- Policy AS6 - Local nature conservation designations
- Policy TB11 - Access, parking and accessibility of local facilities

Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG):

- SPG 5 - Nature and Development , May 2015

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Land use

The application site lies outside of the settlement boundary as defined by the LDP and as such it is regarded as being located within the countryside. Development in such locations is strictly controlled by Policy BW4 of the LDP and should not be permitted unless, amongst other things, it supports the expansion of an existing business in the countryside, or it is for tourism, recreation or leisure facilities. In this instance the application relates to the provision of additional trails that would form part of an established mountain bike centre. Therefore, the principle of the development (as part of an existing leisure facility) is considered to be acceptable and is supported by policy BW4 of the LDP.

Environment

The application site lies within a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC 30, Graig Gethin). As such an ecological assessment was carried out by Hawkeswood Ecology to determine the potential impact the additional mountain bike trails would have on any protected species and habitats. The report acknowledges that the proposed development would result in some loss of the SINC due to the construction of trails however the impact on any habitats would be of minor local significance. The ecological assessment notes of particular concern are the potential impacts to Nightjar birds which are regularly recorded on the hillside. There is likely to already be an impact on the potential breeding areas for these birds, as a result of the forestry clearance works and the presence of existing mountain bike trails. The report highlights that as part of the felling / forestry works more suitable habitats for Nightjar birds can be catered for in the wider forest management plan.

It is concluded in the ecological assessment that the development would cause some local impact on both habitats and species. However, these impacts can be adequately mitigated and opportunities for habitat improvements can be provided by the wider forest management plan which is controlled by Natural Resources Wales. In this regard it is noted that both the Town Planning Division's Countryside Officer and Natural Resources Wales are satisfied with the conclusions reached and have raised no objection to the development. Therefore, the proposal complies with policies BW5 and AS6 of the LDP.

Parts of the application site lie within an area identified in the LDP as a Coal Safeguarding Area, which are to be protected from permanent development that may sterilise or hinder future mineral extraction. Given the nature of the proposal for the construction of trails, it is considered that it would not result in a permanent form of development that hinders any future mineral extraction. Therefore the proposal complies with policy BW10 of the LDP.

Highways

The Design and Access Statement indicates that the parking provision for customers on a day to day basis can be adequately accommodated within the existing car park with surplus parking spaces often available. This capacity is only exceeded when national or international events take place and alternative parking arrangements are often put in place i.e. park and ride from Pentrebach / Abercanaid.

The applicant anticipates that the provision of additional trails will result in a 20% increase in the number of visitors to the mountain bike centre. A revised layout to the existing car park to accommodate additional parking spaces was recently granted permission (P/16/0055). The car park was initially approved (P/12/0235) with a total of 204 parking spaces, which has now been increased to 236 spaces. It is acknowledged that the majority of people travelling to the mountain bike centre are likely to car share as they are usually riding with friends or family members.

During large events which may occasionally take place at the mountain bike centre, it is accepted that the car park may reach full capacity and there is a need for alternative parking facilities to be provided to accommodate any significant increases in visitors. This is considered to be an exception rather than the rule to the everyday operation of the bike park. It is considered that the existing car park provides a sufficient number of parking spaces to accommodate the proposed development to support the day to day running of the bike park. Furthermore, it is considered that the existing forestry road serving the site is capable of accommodating any potential increase in traffic as a result of the development. In this regard it is noted that the Engineering and Highways Manager has not raised any highway safety concerns.

Amenities

It is acknowledged that there are a number of rights of way that cross through various parts of Gethin Forest, which would remain unaffected by the proposed development. Whilst the proposal may see an increase in the number of visitors in the area, it is considered that the additional trails would not result in a significant increase in the level of noise and traffic in the area, to any greater extent than that which already exists. As such the proposal would not have an adverse effect on the continued use of the rights of way or the amenity of other recreational users in the surrounding area. In this regard it is noted that the Rights of Way

Division have not raised any concerns. Therefore the proposal complies with policy BW16 of the LDP.

CONCLUSIONS

For the above reasons the proposed development is considered to be acceptable and complies with the relevant LDP policies. Accordingly, the following recommendation is made:

RECOMMENDATION: BE APPROVED subject to the following **CONDITIONS**

1. The development shall begin not later than five years from the date of this decision.

Reason - To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans and documents:

Drawings 125-P-001 to 125-P-026 and 125-P-028 to 125-P-029, Gethin Bikepark Trail Plan and the ecological assessment report prepared by Hawkeswood Ecology (Dated March 2016).

Reason -To ensure compliance with the approved plans and clearly define the scope of the permission.

INFORMATIVES

1. The grant of planning permission does not entitle developers to obstruct a public right of way. Enforcement action may be taken against any person who obstructs or damages a right of way. Development, in so far as it affects a right of way, should not be started; and the right of way should be kept open for public use until the necessary order under s.247 or s.257 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 for the diversion or extinguishment of the right of way has come into effect. Nor should it be assumed that because planning permission has been granted an order will invariably be made or confirmed. If you need help or advice concerning the diversion or extinguishment order or works effecting a public right of way you should contact Cheryl Jones on 01685 726225 or email: cheryl.jones@merthyr.gov.uk
2. The applicant / developer is advised to contact the Planning Forester at Natural Resources Wales on 0300 068 0279 prior to works commencing on site, to ensure appropriate timing of works, to minimise / manage any potential ecological impacts on any protected species or habitats (in particular Nightjar birds) and to ensure the proposal complements the planned forestry works.
