

SKELF Bike Park, Braidwood, Edinburgh

Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment

November 2015

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Summary:

The Site:

- Is covered by poorly managed semi-mature woodland.
- Is in fairly poor condition, with a low biodiversity value.
- Is underused and undervalued, with a significant ongoing anti social behaviour issues.

Landscape Resource Impacts:

The proposals:

- Inherently provide significant landscape resource benefits by providing a new outdoor sport facility/resource
- Help addressing anti social behaviour by encouraging people back into the woods.
- Improve the accessibility & visibility of the valuable geological outcrops adjacent to the site covered by the Holyrood Park Volcano SSSI
- Have a negligible impact on local ecology

Visual Amenity Impacts:

- The proposals are sensitively integrated into the existing woodland, with the design and location of the Pump Track tying in with existing contours.
- The overwhelmingly green character of the site will be maintained, with negligible loss of visual amenity.
- Changes to ground levels are minimised through selective cut & fill.
- Tree felling is minimised, and any felling required compensated for by new native species planting within the site.
- The impact on key views from the adjacent Holyrood Park will be negligible due to the height and extensive tree cover on the adjacent ridge running along the park boundary.
- Any residual visual impact on those key views will be short lived as the trees on the ridge grow to maturity.

Scope

This brief Landscape & Visual Impact Analysis has been prepared broadly following the methodology outlined in the Guidelines for Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment, Landscape Institute & Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013).

The Study Area:

This study evaluates the landscape and visual impacts of the proposals on:

- The Braidwood site itself (outlined in red on the map below).
- The area immediately surrounding the site, including Holyrood Park.

Sources of information/Baseline Studies:

The following sources of information have been used in this study (see appendix):

- Site Photographs
- Existing OS plans
- Consultations with stakeholder (CEC, SNH & Historic Scotland)
- Ecological Constraints Survey
- Woodland & Tree Impact Assessment
- Archaeological Survey & Written Scheme of Investigation

Potential Impacts:

A summary of the key potential landscape & visual impacts of the proposals on the site and surrounding environment is given below.

Impacts on landscape:

- Public amenity use of the woodland
- Accessibility of the woodland
- Antisocial behaviour within & around the site
- The Holyrood Park Volcano SSSI
- Site ecology

Impact on visual amenity & views:

- Key views from Holyrood Park (designated a Designed Landscape & Area of Great Landscape Value under the Edinburgh City Local Plan)
- The contribution that the woodland on site makes to defining a clear visual boundary between semi-natural landscape of Holyrood Park and urban Southside
- Local views & visual amenity, including the impacts on:
 - Trees
 - Vegetation
 - Ground levels
 - Landscaping

The Proposals

The Site:

The Braidwood is a small area (approx 0.84ha) of woodland located between the Southside area of Edinburgh and the Western boundary of Holyrood Park (see location plan).

Description:

The proposals involve creating cycling trails/tracks within the existing woodland, specifically:

- MTB trails – Approx 800m of 1.2m wide, aggregate surfaced trails threading through the trees, often following the contours, and catering for beginners, younger kids, cycle proficiency classes etc
- A Pump Track - A pump track is a small circuit of rolling bumps, table-top jumps, and bermed corners designed to be ridden continuously without pedalling by using weight shifts (pumping) and gravity. The proposed surface is asphalt as this will provide a sufficiently robust finish capable of withstanding high intensity use in all weathers and resisting vandalism.

Drawings describing the proposal are appended to this report.





Consideration of Alternatives:

Alternative sites:

As the project is inherently site specific, and explicitly intended to address issues affecting both the woodland site itself, and the local community living around it, no alternative sites have been considered,

Alternative layouts within the same site:

The proposals have evolved overtime in response to advice from professional trail designers and other stakeholders.

Specifically, early proposals included a greater length of MTB trails incorporating many timber features, and a smaller pump track located off to side of the existing path & surfaced with crushed stone.

Over time these early ideas evolved to form the current proposals because :

- Professional trail consultants advised against using timber built features & a soft landscaped pump track in an inner city, urban environment.
- The site topography severely limited options for placement of a larger pump track (as most of the site is steeply sloping).

Project Life Cycle

Construction:

Details of construction for both the MTB Trails & Pump Track are summarised below:

MTB Trails:

- Undergrowth & vegetation removed along the route of the trails (approx 3m wide)
- Trees along the route generally retained, but some limited felling required (see woodland & tree impact assessment)
- Trail route stripped of topsoil (1.2m wide, max depth of 350mm)
- Excavated material retained for later landscaping
- Geotextile membrane installed in the excavated strip if required
- Excavated strip filled with approx 250mm-600mm base course of 75mm Crusher Run Quarry aggregate
- Wearing course of approx 30mm of 0-4mm Quarry stone dust
- Surface shaped and compacted to form the trail surface

Pump Track:

- Undergrowth & vegetation stripped within pump track area
- Trees felled as required to form clearing (see woodland & tree impact assessment)
- Pumptrack area stripped of topsoil (to a max depth of 350mm)
- Excavated material retained for later landscaping.
- Level base for pump track formed from approx 250mm-1200mm MOT Type 1
- Track surfaced with wearing course of approx 80mm of Bitumous Macadam

It is anticipated construction of both the trails and pump track will take seven weeks (further information & standard details etc can be found in the full Feasibility Study).



Operation & Maintenance:

Once built the finished facility will:

- Operate on a free and open access basis for the general public
- Be used for occasional group tuition/schools groups etc.
- Have an estimated maximum 30 users on site at any one time
- Have no lighting installed (limiting use out of regular hours)

Maintenance obligations are integrated into the CEC lease for the site, which stipulate:

- The trees & amenity grassland are to continue to be maintained by CEC
- The MTB trails & pump track are to be maintained by BBG
- Any work to trees (including significant pruning) to be agreed with CEC officers in advance

Full details of the proposed operation & maintenance regime for the site as a whole are laid out in the SKELF Business Plan & CEC lease.

Decommissioning & Restoration:

Decommissioning the facility and restoring the site will be relatively straightforward as:

- The materials used to build the trails and track are primarily natural in nature, (with the exception of the pump track final wearing course)
- The proposals are explicitly designed to minimise its environmental/landscape impact through:
 - Retaining as many trees as possible
 - Affecting levels over the site minimally

Note: BBG are obliged as a condition of the lease to reinstate site fully before vacating it.

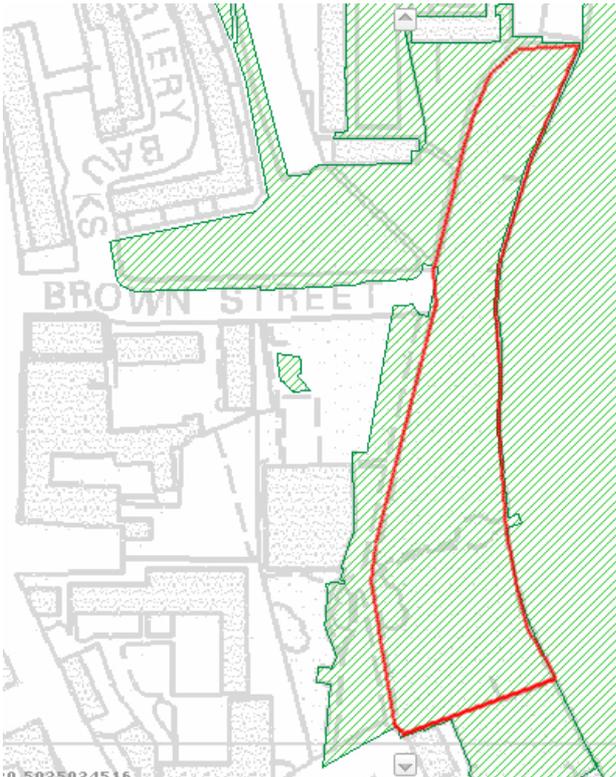
Baseline Studies

A brief factual record of the current nature and value of the landscape & visual amenity of the site.

Landscape:

Public Amenity, Accessibility & Antisocial Behaviour:

The Braidwood offers valuable amenity green space for the local area (see ECLP map extract below).



However, in reality, the woods are seldom used, because they are:

- Poorly maintained: The woods are fairly overgrown as a result of only minimal maintenance provided by the City Council
- Inaccessible: There is only a single formal path giving access to the Heriot Mount steps
- Affected by antisocial behaviour: The woods are home to a wide variety of undesirable antisocial activities (rough sleeping, under-age drinking and intravenous drug abuse), making the woods a no-go area for many local residents. Hotspots for this are shown on the 'as existing' site plan.



As a result, there is currently very limited positive recreational use of the site and its woodland.

Aside from a barely used path leading to the Heriot Mount steps into Holyrood Park, there are no recognised routes within the site, and linkages to the wider Holyrood Park greenspace is strongly limited by the presence of the Park's wall (see site plan).

Overall, the woods are a significantly under-used landscape resource for the local community (and the city as a whole).

Holyrood Park Volcano SSSI:

The ECLP extract below shows the Arthur's Seat Volcano SSSI which covers valuable geological features forming part of the geologically significant 'St Leonards Sill' outcrop.

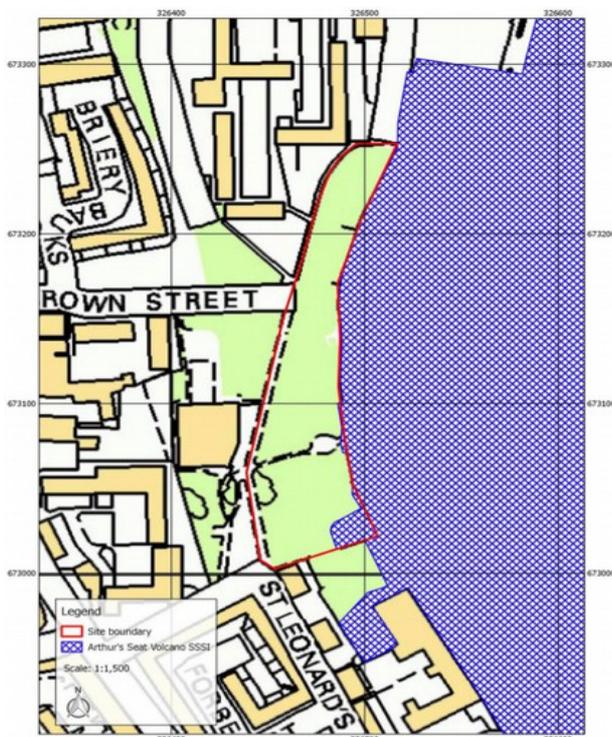


Figure 2. Designated nature conservation sites.

An on-site evaluation was made by SNH officers of:

- The site
- Any likely impacts of the proposals on features covered by the SSSI

SNH subsequently noted:

- The geological exposures covered by the SSSI area are limited to:
 - A rocky promontory at the South end of the site (opposite the corner of St Leonard's Hill / Bowmont Place)
 - The exposed bedrock forming the base of the Park's boundary wall
- As the proposals do not affect these exposures, no SSSI consent is required.
- They would support:
 - Removal of any trees / vegetation within 5 to 10 metres of the rock exposures
 - Increasing the amount of visible rock exposure via ground works / excavation

Ecology:

An Ecological Constraints Survey was carried out on BBG's behalf in November 2015 by Central Environmental Surveys Ltd. That report forms part of the planning submission.

In terms of the site's current ecological value, the report's summary notes:

- The majority of the site is plantation woodland with a high proportion of non-native shrubs and trees as well as semi-natural regeneration.
- There are small areas of unimproved neutral grassland, tall ruderals and continuous scrub, as well as amenity grassland.
- The overall ecological value is limited by the woodland's lack of maturity and the high proportion of non-native species present.
- Protected Birds: None found.
- Protected Bats: Trees on the site do not have a significant potential as bat roost habitat (as the woodland is relatively young).
- Other Protected Species: No other protected species, or signs of protected species, such as badgers, were found across the site or within 50m of the site boundary.



Visual Amenity & Views:

Landscape Character:

The Braidwood site forms part of a larger, heavily wooded & pronounced ridge running along the Western boundary of Holyrood Park from Pollok Halls in the South to Dynamic Earth in the North.



The Braidwood site lies on the western, city-facing side of this ridge approximately 8m below the ridge line.



A summary of the landscape character areas within the site can be found in the 'habitats and land-use types' plan shown below prepared as part of the Ecological Constraints Survey.



Key Views:

From the West side, the woodland is only clearly visible from a fairly confined area immediately adjacent to the site, in particular from the Carnegie Court residential development, as well for users of the Broadwood Gate path and the Craggs Sports Centre

From those vantage points, the woodland forms an attractive green boundary to Holyrood Park, although it obscures views onto the historic boundary wall and rocky outcrops.

The mown grass verge between Braidwood Gate and the woodland gives the wood a neat frontage.



The impact of the proposals on this visual amenity will be evaluated in the following section.



From the East, Holyrood Park side, the site is not visible from the nearby Queens Drive (as the road is much lower and the site is thoroughly screened by the ridge and the woodland on its East flank).

The site is visible from within the Park from the (considerably higher) Radical Road, Salisbury Crags and Arthur's Seat.

However, given the relative heights and the extensive tree cover along the wider ridge, visibility of the site itself from these locations is almost entirely restricted to the upper canopy of the trees within the site.

The east-facing flank of the ridge (within Holyrood Park itself) is more prominent visually and this will increase over time as the trees in the park grow to maturity.



Assessment & Evaluation of Landscape & Visual Effects:

The landscape & visual effects identified in this report are summarised below:

Landscape Impacts:	Public amenity use of the woodland	
	Accessibility of the woodland	
	Antisocial behaviour within/around the site	
	The Holyrood Park Volcano SSSI	
	Site ecology	
Visual Amenity Impacts:	Key views from Holyrood Park	
	Green boundary to Holyrood Park	
	Local views & visual amenity:	Trees & Vegetation
		Ground levels
		Landscaping

In the following section, we assess for each of these impacts:

- Whether the impact is positive or negative
- The scale of the impact
- The geographical extent of the impact
- Whether the impact is reversible or not

We then assess:

- What the impacts are affecting
- How important those things are
- How sensitive those things are

Based on these assessments we estimate the overall significance of each impact over the following pages:

Impact on General Public Amenity of New Facility & Increased Accessibility

Effect	Source	Creating Pump Track & MTB Trails as outdoor sport facility
	Pos/Neg?	Positive
	Scale	High
	Extent	Whole site
	Reversible?	Yes
Affected	Impacts On	Local area & wider city amenity
	Importance	Local
	Sensitivity	Medium
Overall Evaluation	Significant positive impact	



A similar Pump Track in Germany

Impact on Anti Social Behaviour

Effect	Source	Facility brings people/activity back into derelict woods
	Pos/Neg?	Positive
	Scale	Medium
	Extent	Whole site
	Reversible?	Yes
Affected	Impacts On	Local amenity & Quality of Life for residents
	Importance	Local
	Sensitivity	Medium
Overall Evaluation	Positive impact	

Holyrood Park Volcano SSSI		
Effect	Source	Improving access to & visibility of geological outcrops
	Pos/Neg?	Positive
	Scale	Small
	Extent	Very localised
	Reversible?	Yes
Affected	Impacts On	Geological outcrops covered by SSSI designation
	Importance	National
	Sensitivity	Low
Overall Evaluation	Small positive impact	



Geological outcrops hidden by undergrowth

Impact on Site Ecology: Pump Track		
Effect	Source	Forming clearing in woods & construction of Pump Track
	Pos/Neg?	Negative
	Scale	Small
	Extent	Localised
	Reversible?	Yes
Affected	Impacts On	Local ecology
	Importance	Low (ecological value of woodland is limited)
	Sensitivity	Medium
Overall Evaluation	Small negative impact (see separate report)	

Impact on Site Ecology: MTB Trails		
Effect	Source	Construction of MTB Trails
	Pos/Neg?	Negative
	Scale	Negligible
	Extent	Very localized
	Reversible?	Yes
Affected	Impacts On	Local ecology
	Importance	Low (ecological value of woodland is limited)
	Sensitivity	Medium
Overall Evaluation	Negligible impact (see separate report)	

Impact on Holyrood Park - Key Views & Green Boundary: Pump Track		
Effect	Source	Forming clearing in woods & construction of Pump Track
	Pos/Neg?	Negative
	Scale	Negligible
	Extent	Wide area
	Reversible?	Yes
Affected	Impacts On	Designed Landscape / Area of Great Landscape Value
	Importance	National
	Sensitivity	Low
Overall Evaluation		Very minor impact

Note:

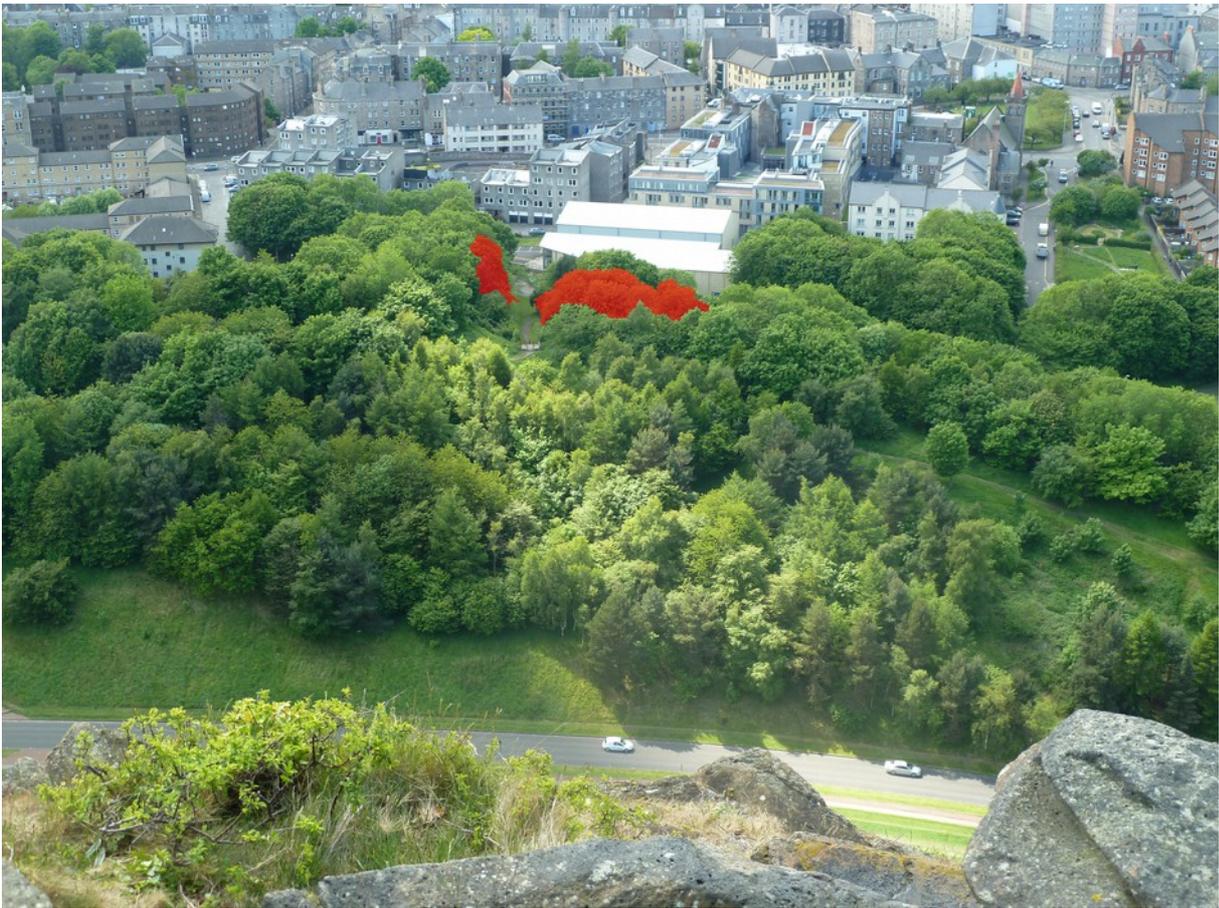
The impact of the proposals on key views from within Holyrood Park has been evaluated below using before-and-after photo-montages of the site as seen from the 'Cats Nick' on Salisbury Crags.

As can be seen, the anticipated impact of the creation of the clearing for the Pump Track is very minor as:

- The corridor of trees running along the edge of the park remains unbroken
- The overall envelope of the woodland remain very much as existing.
- Very little of the Pump Track can be seen from the park as the majority of the clearing is hidden from view by trees within the park on the East flank of the ridge.

The site as existing



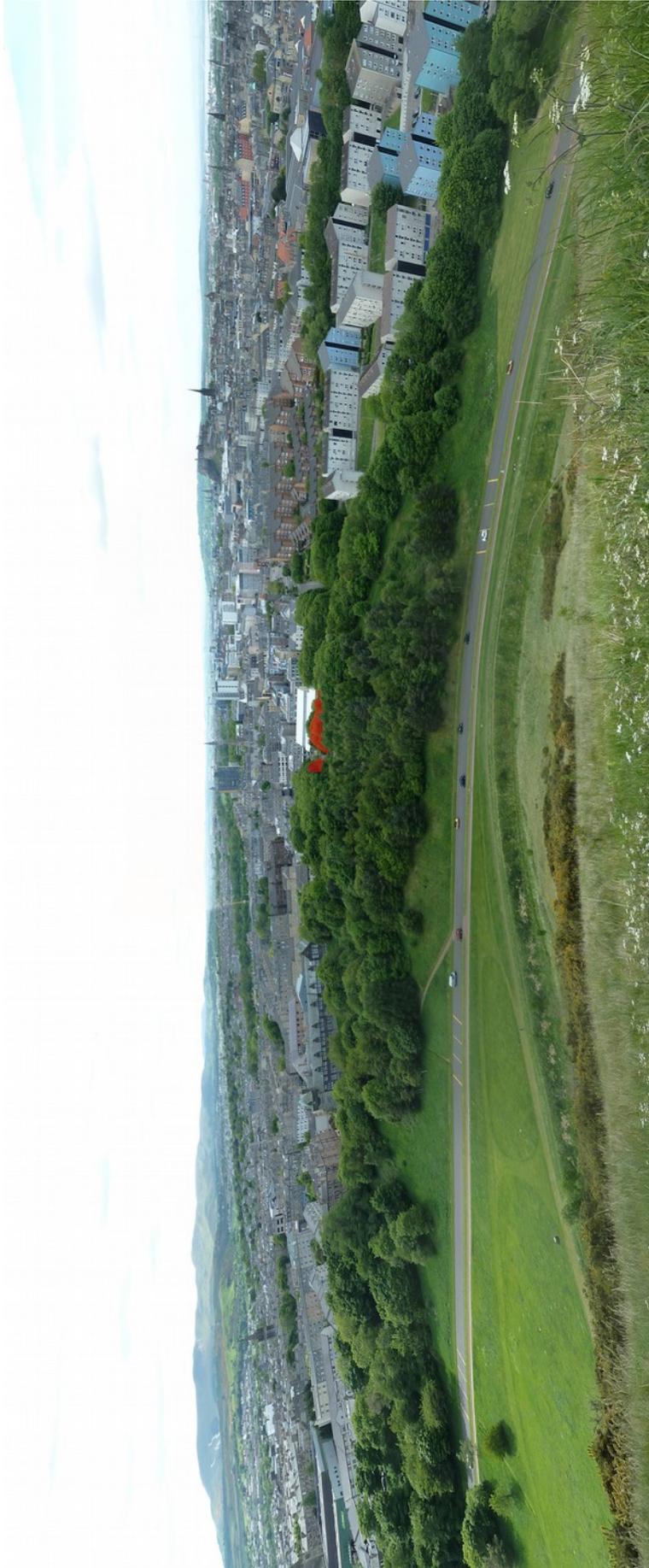


bove: Trees requiring to be felled to form the Pump Track clearing

Below: Impression of impact on woodland of formation of this clearing.



The proposed tree felling seen in the context of the wider wooded ridge:



Holyrood Park - Key Views & Green Boundary: MTB Trails		
Effect	Source	Forming MTB trails through woods
	Pos/Neg?	Negative
	Scale	Negligible
	Extent	Wide area
	Reversible?	Yes
Affected	Impacts On	Designed Landscape / Area of Great Landscape Value
	Importance	National
	Sensitivity	Low
Overall Evaluation	No impact	

Note:

Creation of the MTB trails involve very minimal felling, with no appreciable loss of canopy cover (see Tree & Woodland Report) , and are very unlikely to be visible from within the Park



Impact on Local Visual Amenity & Views From West: Pump Track		
Effect	Source	Forming clearing in woods & construction of Pump Track
	Pos/Neg?	Negative
	Scale	Minor
	Extent	Localised
	Reversible?	Yes
Affected	Impacts On	Local visual amenity / 'greenness'
	Importance	Local
	Sensitivity	Low
Overall Evaluation	Minor negative impact	

Mitigation:

Mitigation measures aim to avoid, reduce the impact of & compensate for adverse effects of the proposals on the landscape & visual amenity.

Mitigation can be achieved through:

- Integral elements of the overall design
- Detailed construction practices
- Enhancement measures

The adverse effects identified in the preceding section are generally very slight, primarily as a result of mitigation measures being integrated into the overall designs from the outset.

Measures adopted as part of overall design:

- Anti-social behaviour hotspots opened up through a reduction in low level vegetation at key locations
- Vegetation/shrubs obscuring valuable geological outcrops removed to increase visibility
- Tree felling minimized
- Overall woodland canopy outer boundary & visual 'volume' retained
- Significant level changes avoided & excavation minimised through careful use of cut & fill
- Enhanced pedestrian access to woods

The following standard detailed construction practices for further avoiding and minimising landscape & visual impact effects are then proposed:

- MTB Trails routed around trees
- MTB Trails surfaced with natural materials
- Shallow excavation along MTB trails to avoid damage to tree roots
- Remove invasive species (the small stand of Giant hogweed).

Finally, the following additional compensatory measures have been adopted to address remaining adverse effects:

- Additional planting of native trees species in the areas identified to boost biodiversity on site, compensate for the loss of trees elsewhere and strengthen the green edge to Holyrood Park.
- Bat boxes installed to encourage bats into the woods

Impact on Local Visual Amenity & Views From West: MTB Trails		
Effect	Source	Forming MTB trails through woods
	Pos/Neg?	Negative
	Scale	Negligible
	Extent	Localised
	Reversible?	Yes
Affected	Impacts On	Local visual amenity / 'greenness'
	Importance	Local
	Sensitivity	Low
Overall Evaluation	Negligible impact	

Stakeholder & Public Engagement:

Consultation to Date:

BBG have consulted extensively with both the local community, the local authority and other key stakeholders throughout project development, gaining wide support for the proposals:

City of Edinburgh Council:

CEC have provided real ongoing political, financial and practical support for the project from the outset:

- CEC Ward Councillors: Local councillors have offered strong cross-party support for the project (particularly Steve Burgess and Jim Orr). This support was echoed by the wider Council body on the 22nd November 2012, when the full Council passed a motion supporting the project.
- CEC Environment Services Department): David Doig, Environment manager (responsible for Parks & Green space for the South Central Ward), has been a key supporter of the project from its inception.
- CEC Land Survey Department: Carried out a topographical survey of site pro bono.
- CEC Housing & Regeneration: Officers carried out an extensive consultation with local residents on the proposals, and on the basis of demonstrated support agreed to draw up the lease for the site.
- CEC Archaeologist: Following an Historic Scotland recommendation, BBG consulted CEC archaeology officers to identify any non-scheduled archaeology within the site, who confirmed that there is no record of any such non-scheduled archaeology within the site.

Historic Scotland:

- Archaeology: HS were consulted on scheduled archaeology within the site and have confirmed that there are no records of any scheduled archaeology within the site that would preclude construction of bike trails.
- Landscape Impact: HS were consulted on the potential visual impact of the proposals of the Holyrood Park landscape. Their conclusion was:

“We can confirm that we have no objection in principle to the proposals for a bike skills park in this location, given the tree cover within Holyrood Park adjacent to this location and the location of the bike skills park outside the boundary wall we consider that there will be little impact on the setting of the scheduled monument and designed landscape”

- Holyrood Park Wall: HS were also consulted on the status of the Holyrood Park perimeter wall (running down the Eastside of the site), re ownership, maintenance

responsibility, and any implications for the construction of bike trails. Again, HS noted no objection to the proposals providing construction of the trails “avoids having any direct physical impact on the scheduled wall”.

Other Stakeholders

- Scottish Natural Heritage: SNH were consulted as part of the site is covered by a SSSI designation intended to protect valuable geological outcrops. Following a site visit, Historic Scotland noted no opposition to the creation of the trails, providing their recommendations were followed, and that no SSSI consent would be required provided no work affecting the protected outcrops was proposed.
- The Craggs Community Sports Centre: This immediately adjacent, nonprofit run sports centre fully supports the project, and will be BBG's key partner in managing the facility.
- Canongate Youth: CY see the bike park as an integral part of their wider 'Dumbiedykes to St Leonards Play Corridor' proposals for the local area.

Local Community:

There have now been four separate public consultations on the project:

- CEC Housing & Regeneration officers leafleted approx 350 local households seeking support for offering BBG a lease (a legal requirement of the process).
- COMAS, a local community development organisation, was commissioned by Canongate Youth to look at public support for increased outdoor play provision for the area generally (including the SKELF bike park). COMAS conducted a very thorough, face-to-face interview-based survey of local residents. The resulting report highlights local people's disquiet about antisocial behaviour in the area, and clear support for taking the woods in hand and developing bike/play facilities there.
- BBG's own paper-based surveys distributed to local people at public 'Open Day' events over the last two years.
- An online survey carried out by the external consultants, Community Enterprise who we commissioned to prepare our Business Plan.

All of these consultations have shown strong local community support for the project.

Beyond these specific consultation exercises, the project has been featured in the Dumbiedykes residents newsletter and communicated to the public via the BBG website