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From: tuachtrackkintore
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Support for Pitfichie Hill Bike Trails & Car Park
Date: 13 August 2026 22:18:23

Hi

I'd like to register my support for Gravitate North East's asset transfer request for the Pitfichie Hill bike trails and car park.

I'm Chair of Tuach Track Community Group in Kintore, where we're working to create more opportunities for local children and families to get outdoors and onto bikes.

Facilities like Pitfichie are a massive asset to the North East, and properly managed trails, access and parking can only be a positive thing for riders and the wider community.

We're also hoping to organise away days for local youngsters to ride facilities and trails across the area, so seeing places like Pitfichie supported and developed is something we're fully behind.

Happy to add my support.

Cheers


Tuach Track Community Group - Kintore
tuachtrackkintore@gmail.com
<https://www.facebook.com/tuachtrack>

"Less Scrolling, More Rolling"



This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Support for Pitfichie trails
Date: 14 August 2026 08:59:36

Dear FLS team,

I wanted to get in touch to show my support for Gravitate North East's plans for the Pitfichie MTB trails and their request for a 25 year lease of the land at Pitfichie Hill.

I'm a keen mountain bike rider myself and think this would be a really positive development for the area. [REDACTED] and we regularly visit Pitfichie to ride the trails. It's already a fantastic place to ride, so it would be great to see the trail network developed further.

I think the plans would be a real asset to the area and would help attract more riders to Pitfichie, while giving existing riders even more opportunities to enjoy the trails.

I'm very much in support of the proposal and hope FLS will look favourably on the asset transfer request.

Many thanks for considering my comments.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Support for GNE Pitfichie Hill
Date: 14 August 2026 10:09:21

[REDACTED]. I

have listened to the arguments on both sides and definitely come down on the 'in favour' side.

I believe that the development and management of the hill will be a huge improvement on the current, unregulated situation.

GNE have done their homework and come across as really committed to providing a top class venue for riders as well as accommodating valid concerns from residents of the community. They have shown that they take environmental and wildlife issues very seriously and have made changes to their plans in accordance with any proven problems that have arisen in the course of the consultation with the community.

Personally, I am not likely to be riding a mountain bike down a hill but, any initiative to get people, young and old, out in the fresh air and countryside has my vote.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Cc: secretarycmmcc@gmail.com
Subject: Objection to the proposed Gravitate North East (GNE) Pitfichie Hill Development
Date: 15 August 2026 17:01:06

Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to formally object to the proposed Gravitate North East (GNE) development at Pitfichie Hill.

I want to make clear at the outset that my objection is not an objection to mountain biking or to the responsible maintenance and development of the existing mountain-bike facilities at Pitfichie.

Indeed, on a personal level, I am a keen road & mountain biker myself and regularly use and enjoy the existing, well-established trails at Pitfichie. I value the opportunity the forestry trails provide to exercise outdoors and enjoy the natural environment, escaping from the busyness, noise, vehicles & danger that can be encountered during road cycling.

My objection is specifically to the **scale, nature and location of the proposed development**, particularly the introduction of a commercial downhill facility, regular vehicle uplift operations, increased visitor traffic and associated parking demand into what is currently a relatively quiet rural environment.

[REDACTED], I have heard the concerns expressed directly by many members of the community. In my view, the submitted proposals do not even attempt to address those concerns.

Access through Monymusk and the impact on the village

One of my principal concerns is the likely increase in traffic through Monymusk.

The most obvious route to the development appears likely to involve traffic passing through the centre of the village before continuing towards Pitfichie. The road through the village has no parking restrictions and, when vehicles are parked along it, the available carriageway can effectively be reduced to single-flow traffic.

This is a small village environment rather than a road network designed around a significant new visitor attraction. The route directly serves a number of community facilities, including the primary school, nursery, village hall and playground.

I recognise that much of the proposed activity is likely to take place at weekends, particularly given the recreational nature of the development, but the proposed operation is not restricted to weekends. The Site Operation Plan envisages uplift operations Thursday to Sunday and the development also anticipates organised events.

My concern is therefore that additional development-generated traffic will be introduced into an already constrained village environment, increasing the potential for congestion and conflict between these vehicles and other road users.

The applicant's own response to the question of traffic and children attending the primary school acknowledges that it has not identified data for traffic passing through the village square, instead referring to the 2019 B933 traffic count.

In my view, a traffic count on the B933 does not adequately demonstrate the impact of additional development traffic within the village itself.

The final 1.25 mile of access is a single-track road

The concerns become greater beyond the village.

The final approach to the development is a narrow single-track road with passing places. It is effectively a dead-end road which, primarily serves residents and existing recreational users of forest trails including a relatively limited mountain-bike traffic compared with what is now being proposed.

The applicant itself acknowledges that traffic associated with the development will use the single-track road and estimates that at peak periods approximately 60 cars per day will use it.

The financial and business information, however, assumes approximately **10,000 cars per year** (and 20,000 riders per year).

This represents a substantial change in the intensity of use of a road which is currently appropriate to a rural forestry and recreational setting.

I am not convinced that simply stating that 60 cars per day is comparable with other rural roads adequately addresses the particular characteristics of this road, including its single-track nature, passing places, dead-end configuration and the presence of other recreational users.

I think it should be considered not only the number of vehicles but also **when those vehicles will arrive, how frequently they will meet other traffic and how the road will function when the development is operating at peak capacity or hosting events.**

Charging for parking could create additional off-site parking problems

The development proposes to charge visitors for parking.

The financial plan assumes approximately 10,000 cars annually and includes a parking charge within its projected income. It also assumes that a proportion of visitors will not pay.

This creates a straightforward concern: some visitors may seek to avoid the parking charge by parking elsewhere.

The Site Operation Plan itself recognises the possibility of off-site informal parking and states that this will be reviewed monthly or as required. It also provides for overflow parking during periods of high demand. That is significant because it demonstrates that the applicant itself recognises that parking demand may extend beyond the formal car park.

There is already recreational parking pressure around Pitfichie. Additional vehicles using passing places, verges and laybys would create further congestion, inconvenience local residents and potentially obstruct the very passing places upon which the single-track road depends.

If parking charges are an integral part of the business model, then robust measures should be stated to prevent development-generated vehicles simply being displaced onto the surrounding road network.

Amplifying this issue further the vehicle of choice for many mountain bikers is the van or campervan which introduces overnight parking. The proposal from GNE only goes so far as to say it will try to discourage.

Regular uplift vehicles on shared forestry roads

The proposed uplift operation is another major concern.

The Site Operation Plan expressly states that **uplift vehicles will share the forest road with other forest users.** It specifically identifies walkers, horse riders and cyclists and proposes that uplift vehicles slow to a stop when approaching them, either waiting for the user to pass or waiting for the user to move safely off the road.

This is an important acknowledgement.

The forestry roads are currently enjoyed by a wide range of users, including mountain bikers, horse riders, walking groups, runners and dog walkers. The proposed development would introduce regular commercial vehicle movements into this shared environment.

The proposed mitigation effectively requires other users to accommodate the uplift vehicles.

I am concerned that, particularly during periods of regular uplift operation, the vehicles would come to dominate the use and character of the forest roads, to the detriment of the other recreational users who currently enjoy them.

The Site Operation Plan states that the site will remain open to all users all year round. However, maintaining formal public access does not necessarily mean that all users will continue to enjoy the same quality of experience or level of safety.

There also seems to be contradictory information supplied about if vehicles will be limited to 10mph or 15mph which should be clarified.

The nature of the proposed facility is specialist Downhill Racing

As someone who actually uses the existing Pitfichie trails, I think it is important to distinguish between mountain biking as general outdoor recreation and the proposed specialist downhill operation.

I enjoy riding Pitfichie because of the existing trails and the opportunity to exercise, ride with others and enjoy the forest environment. That is very different from creating a facility centred around repeated downhill runs, paid

uplift and competitive downhill racing.

The applicant's own FAQ makes clear that a significant objective is the creation of "**world class, downhill competition trails**", intended to help develop riders towards world-class competition.

The Site Operation Plan also anticipates up to five events per year, with between 100 and 250 participants.

Pitfichie has hosted 2 events this year and both i believe resulted in numerous disturbance complaints.

This is therefore not simply a proposal to improve the existing recreational trail network. It is a proposal for a specialist downhill facility with a commercial uplift operation and large organised events.

That distinction matters when assessing the likely traffic, parking and recreational impacts.

The claimed family-friendly nature of the proposal needs to be considered realistically

The proposal is presented in part as being beneficial to families, young people and outdoor recreation.

I do not dispute that mountain biking can provide substantial benefits to health, fitness and wellbeing, and the existing trails clearly already provide those opportunities.

However, I question whether a paid downhill uplift facility should be characterised as an activity that is broadly accessible to all.

Many recreational mountain bikers, including keen amateur riders, now use e-bikes to assist with climbing rather than paying for repeated vehicle uplift. The most likely regular users of a paid uplift service are therefore those who specifically want repeated downhill runs, particularly experienced and competitive riders who do not ride E-bikes.

The applicant's own material describes Pitfichie as a smaller and more challenging facility for **specialist bikes and riders** and identifies uplift capacity as a factor limiting visitor numbers.

Downhill racing is also a relatively expensive form of cycling. With entry-level downhill racing bikes costing several thousand pounds, this is not an activity that can realistically be regarded as equally accessible to all families or sections of the community.

I therefore question whether the wider community benefits being claimed are sufficient to justify the scale and nature of the proposed commercial operation.

Concerns about the financial and business assumptions

The business plan also raises questions about the level of demand upon which the proposal is based.

The principal source of projected income is the uplift service. The plan assumes sustained operation over a almost all of the year and significant ongoing demand for paid uplift.

The proposal therefore appears to rely almost entirely on a relatively specialist market.

There is also a question about the practical capacity of the uplift service. The business plan identifies a potential capacity of approximately 35 uplift runs during an eight-hour operating day, but an individual rider using the service at its capacity would only be able to potentially obtain 8 uplifts during that period based on vehicles operating and the return trip time for vehicle. Based Strava data for existing downhill trails at Pitfichie the Bikes could be back at the carpark before the uplift vehicle can make the return journey.

It should be carefully considered whether the assumptions around rider numbers, uplift usage and parking demand are sufficiently robust to justify the scale of infrastructure and associated impacts proposed.

Community support should be considered in the round

[REDACTED], I was not aware at the time of the community survey which GNE subsequently presented as evidence of support.

The applicant's own Evidence of Community Support document states that its survey received **82 responses**. Its own summary categorises approximately 45–50% as strong supporters, 25–30% as cautious or neutral and 20–25% as strong objectors. Importantly, it identifies traffic and access as the largest negative issue.

I was however aware of an actual community-organised survey of residents which received approximately **250 responses**, of which around **90% were against** the development.

I therefore ask to consider all evidence of community opinion carefully and independently, rather than relying on the applicant's survey as evidence of broad community support.

The applicant's own survey demonstrates that there was a significant level of concern even within its own consultation exercise, particularly regarding traffic and access.

Alternative locations and approaches have not been adequately explored

[REDACTED], the community raised a number of alternatives.

Some of these included:

- using the **Whitehill entrance to Pitfichie**, which would avoid routing development traffic through Monymusk and provides much quicker access from the main B-road;
- further developing the nearby **Tarland Trails**;
- investing in development at **the Lecht**, potentially making use of existing uplift infrastructure.

These suggestions were raised as potential ways of delivering the recreational and sporting benefits being sought while avoiding some of the particular impacts on Monymusk.

[REDACTED], the response to these suggestions was essentially that GNE wanted to develop this particular site.

I do not believe that is sufficient justification for selecting a location where the access arrangements create such obvious concerns.

The applicant's own evidence confirms that Tarland Trails already attract up to approximately 40,000 visitors a year. GNE itself identifies Tarland as a more appropriate comparison for Pitfichie than much larger centres such as Glentress.

In contrast the Tarland Trail centre is designed to suit all ages & abilities and is accessed directly from a B road well away from the substantially larger village than Monymusk.

The proposal changes the nature and balance of recreational use at Pitfichie

Pitfichie is already a successful recreational & natural environment.

It is used by mountain bikers, walkers, horse riders, runners, dog walkers and other visitors. I am personally one of the mountain bikers & dog walkers who regularly enjoys the existing trails as i am also a local resident.

My concern is that the proposed development would change the balance of use from largely informal and dispersed recreation towards a managed commercial downhill facility, involving paid parking, regular uplift vehicles and organised events.

The Site Operation Plan confirms that uplift vehicles will operate on the forest roads and that the facility is intended to host organised events. Event planning will include traffic and car-parking management, vehicle uplift requirements and spectator management.

This is therefore not simply an improvement to an existing trail network. It represents a significant change in the intensity and character of recreational use.

This change of use through vehicles and numbers of people visiting can surely only negatively impact the natural environment.

Conclusion

I would emphasise again that I am not opposed to anyone enjoying the existing forestry trails as I and many others already do.

My objection is to the proposed commercial downhill facility and its associated scale of activity, with apparent disregard for the negative impact on the community.

I believe the proposed development risks imposing significant additional traffic, parking pressure and vehicle movements on a small rural community and on forestry roads which are currently shared by a wide range of recreational users.

I therefore respectfully ask that any proposed development of this scale or introducing vehicles on to forest trails is denied.

In particular, I believe FLS & Aberdeenshire Council should be satisfied that:

1. the road network through Monymusk is capable of safely accommodating the additional development-generated traffic;
2. the single-track final access route can safely accommodate the predicted traffic alongside residents and existing recreational users;
3. sufficient parking will be provided to prevent development-generated vehicles from using surrounding verges, passing places and laybys;
4. the impact of regular uplift vehicles on walkers, horse riders, cyclists, runners and other forest users has been properly assessed;
5. the claimed level of visitor demand and financial viability is supported by robust evidence;
6. the evidence of community support is considered alongside all other evidence of local opinion;
7. reasonable alternative locations and access arrangements have been properly considered;
8. the impact on the character and tranquillity of Monymusk and Pitfichie is acceptable; and
9. any claimed and real community, recreational and economic benefits are sufficient to outweigh the additional impacts generated by the proposed commercial operation.

Supporting mountain biking does not mean that every proposed form or scale of mountain-bike development is appropriate in every location.

In this case, I believe the proposed commercial downhill facility is being proposed in a location where the existing road network, village environment and shared recreational forest infrastructure are not appropriate for the intensity of use being proposed.

I therefore respectfully request that this objection be taken into account when determining the application.

Yours faithfully,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Objection to Proposed Gravitare North East Development at Pitfichie Hill
Date: 15 August 2026 17:47:32

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing as a local resident [REDACTED] to formally object to the proposal by Gravitare North East to take a 25-year lease of approximately 1.24 hectares of land at Pitfichie Hill for the creation of a car park, riders' paddock area and two mountain bike trails.

I appreciate the value of outdoor recreation and understand that mountain biking is already an established activity at Pitfichie. However, I strongly believe that the proposed development would represent a significant and inappropriate intensification of recreational use in an otherwise quiet rural area, with consequences for local residents, road safety, the character of the area and local wildlife.

1. Traffic and road safety

My principal concern is the likely increase in vehicle movements associated with the proposed development.

Pitfichie and the surrounding area are rural and the roads are relatively quiet, narrow in places and, importantly, do not have pavements. They are used by local residents, walkers, cyclists, horse riders and other people enjoying the countryside. The existing character of the area depends in part upon this relatively low level of traffic.

The creation of a dedicated car park and riders' facilities is likely to attract substantially more visitors by car, particularly given that the purpose of the proposal is to provide formal infrastructure for mountain biking. The associated increase in vehicle movements would inevitably alter the character of the surrounding roads and could create additional risks for pedestrians and other vulnerable road users.

This is of particular concern to me personally as a local resident [REDACTED] and the roads and tracks around [REDACTED] and Pitfichie provide some of the very few opportunities for residents in this rural area to walk safely and enjoy the countryside directly from home.

There is no pavement network available as an alternative. Increased traffic on these roads would therefore have a direct impact on the ability of local residents to walk in their own neighbourhood safely and comfortably.

I would ask Forestry and Land Scotland to give considerably greater weight to the safety and amenity of existing residents and pedestrians when assessing this proposal.

2. Increased pollution and loss of rural amenity

The proposal would also introduce a more intensive recreational use into an area which is currently characterised by its rural and relatively tranquil nature.

An increase in visitors arriving by car would bring additional vehicle emissions, noise and disturbance. While each individual vehicle movement may appear relatively minor, the cumulative effect of a development specifically designed to attract visitors to the site should not be underestimated.

The attraction of Pitfichie is precisely its rural setting. Increasing traffic and visitor numbers risks undermining the qualities which make the area attractive to both residents and recreational users in the first place.

I am concerned that a development of this nature would establish a precedent for further intensification of recreational infrastructure at Pitfichie in the future.

3. Impact on wildlife and biodiversity

I am also concerned about the impact of the proposal on the wildlife which inhabits and uses the Pitfichie area.

Pitfichie is not simply a recreational space. It forms part of a wider forest and upland environment supporting a variety of wildlife and birdlife. The Forestry and Land Scotland material describes the wider Pitfichie and Corrennie area as approximately 2,500 hectares, comprising predominantly conifer woodland together with areas of broadleaved woodland and upland heathland around the hill summits. ([Forestry and Land Scotland](#))

The increased presence of vehicles, people, mountain bikes and associated activity has the potential to disturb wildlife which currently uses these habitats.

In particular, I am concerned about disturbance to pine martens and other woodland mammals, as well as birdlife and other species which depend upon the relatively quiet woodland and upland environment.

The cumulative impact of increased noise, lighting if introduced, vehicle movements, trail construction, vegetation clearance and increased human presence should therefore be properly assessed rather than considering the proposed trails and car park in isolation.

I would ask Forestry and Land Scotland to ensure that a robust and independent ecological assessment is undertaken before any decision is made, including consideration of wildlife using the surrounding land and not simply the footprint of the proposed 1.24-hectare lease area.

4. The character of Pitfichie and the interests of existing residents

Forestry and Land Scotland's own material recognises the diverse interests represented in the Pitfichie and Corrennie area, including local residents and recreational users, and states its commitment to an open and transparent land management process.

I ask that the interests of existing local residents are given proper consideration alongside the benefits claimed for the proposed development.

There is an important distinction between allowing responsible informal recreation to take place and creating dedicated infrastructure intended to attract substantially greater numbers of visitors.

Pitfichie already has a recognised role as a recreational area, including mountain biking, trails and mountain access. The existence of these activities does not, however, mean that every further intensification of use is appropriate.

The proposed car park and riders' paddock would facilitate and encourage a significant increase in organised mountain biking activity. This is a material change from simply allowing people to access the existing countryside.

5. Long-term implications of a 25-year lease

I am particularly concerned about the proposed **25-year lease**.

A commitment of this length has the potential to permanently alter the way this part of Pitfichie is used and to create pressure for further development and expansion in the future.

The proposal should therefore be considered not only in terms of the immediate physical footprint of 1.24 hectares, but also in terms of the likely long-term consequences for traffic, visitor numbers, noise, wildlife and the wider character of the area.

Once infrastructure such as a dedicated car park and riders' facilities has been established, it is difficult to argue that the change is readily reversible in practical terms.

6. A rural community should not bear the unintended consequences of increased visitor numbers

I fully recognise that outdoor recreation can bring benefits and that mountain biking is an increasingly popular activity. I do not object to people enjoying Pitfichie or to responsible mountain biking taking place there.

My objection is to the **scale and intensification of use that would be facilitated by this particular proposal**, and the resulting impact on the people and wildlife already living in and using this rural environment.

The benefits of attracting additional visitors should be balanced against the costs imposed on the existing community. In particular, local residents should not be expected to accept increased road danger, traffic, pollution, noise and disturbance simply because the development may provide recreational or economic benefits to visitors from outside the area.

Conclusion

For the reasons set out above, I respectfully ask Forestry and Land Scotland to **refuse the proposed lease to Gravitare North East**.

In particular, I ask that proper consideration is given to:

- the likely increase in traffic on narrow rural roads without pavements;
- the resulting road-safety implications for pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders and local residents;
- the impact on residents' ability to safely walk around their own neighbourhood;
- increased vehicle emissions, noise and general disturbance;
- the impact of increased recreational activity on pine martens, birdlife and other wildlife;
- the potential disturbance caused by trail construction and increased human activity;
- the effect on the tranquillity and rural character of Pitfichie;
- the cumulative and long-term consequences of granting a 25-year lease; and
- the possibility that this development could facilitate further intensification of recreational use in the future.

I would also ask that any ecological, traffic, access and environmental assessments associated with the proposal are made available for proper public scrutiny before any decision is taken.

Pitfichie is a valuable rural environment for both its residents and its wildlife. It is possible to support outdoor recreation while also recognising that there are limits to the level of development and visitor pressure that a rural area can reasonably accommodate.

As a local resident, I strongly believe that this proposal crosses that line and should not proceed.

Yours faithfully,

[REDACTED]

Local resident, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

 This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie Hill - Support for GNE proposed bike infrastructure
Date: 17 August 2026 18:43:05

To whom it may concern,

I am writing in support of the application by Gravitare North East for the proposed lease and development of facilities at Pitfichie Hill, including the car park, trail improvements and associated visitor infrastructure.

[REDACTED] are keen mountain bikers, I have seen first-hand the benefits that access to good trail networks can bring. [REDACTED] have taken part in events at Pitfichie and have gained confidence, improved their fitness and made friendships through the sport. Pitfichie is an important venue for mountain biking in the area, giving riders of all ages the opportunities to develop their skills and take part in organised events.

I would also point to the experience of the Tarland Trails as a separate but relevant example of what can be achieved through investment in well-managed mountain bike facilities. Over the years, the trails at Tarland have become a popular local asset, used by families, recreational riders and visitors from further afield. The benefits to participation in outdoor activity and the wider appeal of the area are now well established and visible to those who use the trails regularly.

While Tarland and Pitfichie are different sites, the success of Tarland demonstrates the long-term value that mountain bike infrastructure can bring to a community. It provides a practical example of how facilities that start with local support can grow into well-used and respected recreational assets and support local businesses.

Pitfichie is already a popular destination for mountain biking in the North East of Scotland, but the current facilities are limited. The proposed improvements would provide better parking, improve visitor access and help manage use of the site more effectively. These changes would make the area safer and more welcoming for families, riders and event participants.

Based on our family's experience at Pitfichie, and having seen the outcomes achieved through the development of the Tarland Trails, I believe this proposal would bring clear benefits to both the local community and visitors to the area.

I fully support this application and encourage Forestry and Land Scotland to approve the request.

Yours faithfully,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

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From: [REDACTED]
To: Forestry FLS Communities; secretarycmcc@gmail.com; andrew.bowie.mp@parliament.uk; john.swinney.msp@parliament.scot
Subject: Objection to Proposal by Gravitare North East development at Pitfichie Hill, Monymusk
Date: 17 August 2026 20:19:43

Dear Sir / Madam

Following public consultation with the Monymusk community where Gravitare North East had no answers to address many of local concerns about the developments and the issues that it could bring I was surprised to find that they have pressed ahead still without addressing those concerns.

My first concern is with the vast increase in traffic the development will cause to our small village and the surrounding unclassified roads. According to GNE's own business plan they hope to attract 10,000 cars a year which is considerably more than the 2 or 3 vehicles carrying mountain bikes that we currently see in the carpark at a weekend. The village is not currently a through road to anywhere specific and once turning off the B road to run through the village, the road goes from 2 way unclassified road down to over a mile of single track road with passing places. Most traffic to the proposed Centre would now pass through the village which currently has a problem with traffic speeding through a 20 mile zone. The aforementioned passing places are sometimes currently occupied with parked cars of mountain bikers who don't want to drive all the way to the current designated car park. The already dangerous crossroads at the bottom of our road was an issue because bikers seemed to want to gather there during the recent biking events, with tractors and cars unable to pass safely due to the inconsiderate placement of the bikes and their riders.

My next concern is that they intend to operate a steady flow of vehicles on the forestry roads, something which up until now has been a quiet and safe place for me to walk our dog off lead and away from noise and traffic. The forest trails are currently used by lots of other user groups from horse riders to hikers however it does rather feel like the uplift vehicles and trailers will dominate the presence on these roads bringing danger and noise to an area people currently use to escape from that.

We were told in the winter there was no money to pay for gritting our roads so that we can safely travel to work, yet the Scottish Government are happy to spend a vast sum of money on this project which will benefit a few people seeking thrills?

We moved here [REDACTED] [REDACTED] for somewhere rural, quiet and peaceful to live. I take great pride in my local area and keep it (including the forest trails) tidy and free of litter. After the recent mountain biking events up in the forest, there has always been litter left behind, including damaged refillable water bottles, hydration sachets, juice cans, torn t-shirts, sweet wrappers etc. I have also witnessed human excrement left behind on more than one occasion. During the most recent event where people were camped out in the field next to the crossroads, I saw people openly urinating in the field, despite portable toilets being provided onsite. The thought of this being a regular occurrence fills me with dread and a great deal of anxiety.

Gravitare North East also appear to be trying to influence the community by offering free services and giving balance bikes to nurseries. The distress that this proposed development is causing in a largely elderly community is extremely worrying. I read about how the wellbeing of the mountain bikers would be improved but it seems no thought has been given to the wellbeing of the existing residents/community? Surely the mountain bikers health would be far improved by cycling up the hill (as they can do at present) rather than by travelling up there in diesel powered vehicles? I dread to think of the impact on our lovely diverse range of wildlife that we are lucky to see there at the moment.

I could see nothing in their business plan to explain where all these people are coming from to make this business viable as the trails have been expanded several times in recent years for Enduro events and this has yet to generate more than a handful of cars at a weekend and this development only intends to add one further trail and the uplift service which seems completely unnecessary given the growing popularity of the ebikes I see in use.

Perhaps if you were to come up and arrange a meeting with the local community, you would realise how much of an impact that this development to benefit a minority group would have on a small community?

I would therefore like to strongly object to the proposal as it stands and unless there is a significant change in the proposal.

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Gravitate North East Transfer Request
Date: 18 August 2026 12:50:25
Attachments: [image652266.png](#)

I am writing to express my strong support for Gravitate NE's transfer request and the proposed development of new mountain bike trails at Pittfichie. As a keen mountain biker, I regularly use the existing trails at Pittfichie and throughout the surrounding area, and I believe the addition of new trails would be a significant asset to the local community and visitors alike.

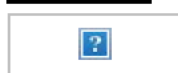
The success of projects such as Tarland Trails demonstrates the positive impact that high-quality trail networks can have on an area. They attract visitors from across the region and beyond, many of whom travel considerable distances, bringing valuable support to local businesses and the wider economy. The project also presents opportunities for local employment through trail construction and maintenance, as well as the operation of uplift services and other associated activities.

On a personal level, I can confidently say that access to mountain biking facilities such as these makes a meaningful contribution to both physical and mental wellbeing. Being able to spend time outdoors, exercise, and enjoy the local landscape has significant health benefits, and expanding these opportunities can only have a positive impact on the community.

For these reasons, I fully support the proposed development and the benefits it would bring to the area.

Regards,

[REDACTED]



[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
 To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
 Cc: [REDACTED]; secretary@monymuskcommunity.org.uk
 Subject: Planning Objection- Biodiversity Plan for Proposed Gravitate North East Development at Pitfichie Hill
 Date: 18 August 2026 15:21:10

Dear Sir or Madam

[REDACTED] This should not be interpreted as a lack of interest or agreement with the proposal. I remain strongly opposed to the potential environmental and ecological impacts of this proposed development.

Introduction

I object to the Biodiversity Plan submitted by Gravitate North East for the proposed development at Pitfichie Hill.

While I support improving biodiversity at Pitfichie, this Plan is not sufficiently robust or comprehensive to demonstrate genuine net biodiversity gain.

The key issue is that biodiversity is considered mainly within a narrow 15.5-hectare corridor (20m either side of proposed trails), a very small part of the wider 2,500-hectare Pitfichie and Corrennie Forest.

The impacts of the development—recreation pressure, erosion, drainage changes, habitat fragmentation and disturbance—will extend far beyond this corridor.

The Plan therefore reads as mitigation for a trail project rather than a landscape-scale biodiversity strategy, which I consider inadequate.

1. Too narrow a focus

The Plan's focus on a 15.5-hectare corridor is too limited to demonstrate meaningful landscape-scale biodiversity gain.

Species and habitats function across the wider forest, not within artificial boundaries.

A landscape-scale approach is required.

2. Insufficient consideration of the wider hill

The Plan does not adequately assess the wider Pitfichie Hill, which already experiences forestry operations, erosion, informal and formal recreation.

The development may increase these pressures, including:

informal trail creation

erosion and soil loss

habitat fragmentation

wildlife disturbance

drainage impacts

cumulative recreational pressure

Without this wider assessment, net gain cannot be demonstrated.

3. Recreation impacts beyond the corridor

Increased mountain biking will likely extend impacts beyond formal trails, including:

new informal trails

trampling and erosion

wildlife disturbance

habitat edge damage

drainage disruption

The Plan lacks a clear strategy to prevent or manage these effects.

4. Reliance on an outdated land management plan

The Plan relies on the 2016 FLS Land Management Plan, despite major landscape changes after Storm Arwen and clear-felling.

A new plan is expected in 2027.

It is unclear why this development is assessed against an outdated framework rather than the forthcoming strategy.

5. Unclear delivery responsibility

Many biodiversity actions depend on land not controlled by Gravitate North East, including forestry operations and deer management.

Key uncertainties remain:

who is responsible for each action

what land is covered

how long commitments last

how delivery is secured

what happens if conflicts arise

how monitoring and funding are ensured

Without clarity, many measures appear aspirational.

6. Uncertain commitments

The Plan frequently uses terms such as “potential”, “where appropriate” and “could”.

This makes it unclear which actions are binding.

A planning decision requires clear, enforceable commitments with measurable outcomes.

7. Net biodiversity gain not demonstrated

The Plan does not quantify:

baseline conditions

habitat loss or disturbance

recreational impacts

net gains or losses

timescales for recovery

measurable success criteria

Without this, net biodiversity gain is not evidenced.

8. Habitat fragmentation not fully addressed

Trails may increase fragmentation through:

habitat division

edge effects

soil disturbance

increased access into sensitive areas

Connectivity benefits are assumed rather than demonstrated.

9. Protection of PAWS and semi-natural woodland

These sensitive habitats require stronger safeguards against:

disturbance

erosion

drainage change

recreational pressure

regeneration impacts

Impacts are not fully assessed.

10. Incomplete ecological baseline

The Plan acknowledges data gaps and records species such as red squirrel and pine marten despite limited surveys.

Further baseline surveys are needed for key species groups before development proceeds.

11. Erosion and drainage impacts

Trail construction may significantly alter:

runoff patterns

soil stability

sediment movement

wet areas and drainage systems

These impacts are not fully integrated into the biodiversity strategy.

12. Biodiversity measures as mitigation only

The 15.5-hectare corridor risks acting as mitigation for wider impacts rather than part of a holistic strategy.

A whole-hill approach is required.

13. Cumulative impacts not fully assessed

The Plan does not adequately consider cumulative effects from:

existing trails

forestry operations

clear-felling and replanting

increased recreation

infrastructure and access

14. Monitoring must extend beyond the corridor

Monitoring should cover the wider hill and include:

informal trail growth

erosion and habitat loss

wildlife disturbance

water quality changes

woodland and heathland condition

Clear thresholds and remedial actions are required.

15. Need for enforceable conditions

If approved, biodiversity measures must be secured through enforceable planning conditions, including:

clear objectives and responsibilities

funding and timescales

monitoring and reporting

protection of sensitive habitats

controls on informal trail creation

remedial mechanisms

Conclusion

The Biodiversity Plan does not demonstrate a genuine net biodiversity gain.

Its main weakness is its narrow focus on a 15.5-hectare corridor within a far larger and ecologically connected landscape, while the development's impacts will extend well beyond this area.

It also relies on an outdated land management framework and lacks clarity on delivery, enforcement, and measurable outcomes.

I therefore request that biodiversity at Pitfichie is assessed at a landscape scale, not as a narrow mitigation exercise linked to the trail network.

Until this is addressed, the Plan does not adequately demonstrate that the proposal will protect or enhance the ecological integrity of Pitfichie Hill.

Yours sincerely



Sent from my Galaxy

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Gravitare Proposal Pitfichie
Date: 18 August 2026 19:17:48

I object to this proposal as it will irrevocably focus the development of a valued local resource on the interests of just one of the many groups who use Pitfichie. One of the charms of this place is its quiet undisturbed nature. This is being increasingly challenged by on occasion, noisy bikers, who also may pay scant regard for the ecosystem they pass through or the interests and safety of others as they career downhill as quickly as possible.

The application asserts that bikers are the largest user group, and base the rest of the application on this unevidenced statement. In our experience this is not the case: hikers and walkers represent the silent and overwhelming majority, whose interests and aspirations are not addressed by this application, and whose enjoyment of Pitfichie could be damaged if the application were to proceed as submitted)

(Our personal details, not for publication please are:

[REDACTED]

Sent from my iPhone

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Objection to Pitfichie Downhill Development
Date: 18 August 2026 19:24:13

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to formally object to the proposed downhill mountain bike development at Pitfichie. As a local resident who regularly enjoys and values this landscape, I am deeply concerned about the impact this project would have on an area that is currently wild, peaceful, and ecologically rich. My primary concern is the significant alteration of the natural hillside. Digging out sections to create downhill tracks will permanently change the character of the environment, damaging habitats and disrupting wildlife that rely on the quiet, undisturbed nature of the area.

I am also concerned about the increase in traffic, litter, and general disturbance that such a development will bring. Previous mountain biking events held in the area have already demonstrated the strain placed on the surroundings. Traffic on narrow rural roads, litter left behind and fog horns sounding out for hours which echoed over a peaceful village and scared the horses that live next to our house. Unfortunately, the organisers did not treat the area with the level of care it deserves, and the aftermath required clean-up and recovery.

In addition, [REDACTED] near the derestricted signs, where speeding is already a serious and persistent problem. The road is not designed for high volumes of fast-moving traffic, and I am extremely concerned about the increased risk [REDACTED] should this development go ahead. Any rise in visitor numbers, particularly during busy periods, would only worsen an already dangerous situation for local families. Given this past experience and the existing road safety issues, I have little confidence that a permanent downhill facility would be managed in a way that protects the environment or respects the local community. The cumulative impact of regular high volume use would be far greater than that of occasional events, and the long term consequences for the landscape could be irreversible. For these reasons, I strongly object to the planning application and urge you to consider the long-term environmental, community, and safety impacts. Pitfichie is a treasured natural space.

Thank you for considering my objection.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

 This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie Hill Biking proposal
Date: 19 August 2026 08:15:20

I know this hill well [REDACTED]. It is a very beautiful peaceful, rural place and does not deserve this massive disruption. The view across the fields to the river is unbeatable and I cannot understand the need to disturb it. Biking already takes place.
Sincerely [REDACTED]

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPad](#)

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Cc: secretarycmmcc@gmail.com
Subject: Objection to Cycling Centre on Pittfichie Hill
Date: 19 August 2026 10:21:11

From [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Hello,

I object to this application because of the large volume of traffic it will cause on small country roads, including in the village of Monymusk, and the single track road past Paradise Wood. The construction of the cycle run and its associated access road and buildings will be damaging to the character of this local beauty spot, and if the development is ever completed there will be a vastly increased volume of traffic on the road bringing cyclists to and from the centre. Obviously this represents a danger to residents of Monymusk, who frequently walk along the road, and major disturbance to wildlife which includes many rare species including ospreys.

[REDACTED] I visit frequently to walk in the forest and on the hill, and enjoy the tranquillity of this wonderful unspoiled landscape.

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Cc: secretarycmmcc@gmail.com
Subject: Objection to downhill centre at Pitfichie, Monymusk.
Date: 19 August 2026 13:53:38

To Whom it May Concern,

I wish to complaint about the proposed downhill biking centre at Pitfichie near Monymusk.

I have been a resident in Monymusk [REDACTED] and enjoy the peace and tranquility hereabouts. Indeed, that was the reason for purchasing a house here! Over the last 10 years we have seen the size of the village doubled with 75+ new houses built and the large increase in vehicle traffic associated with these new commuter dwellings that must pass through the Village centre which is already congested due to on-street parking.

Your map showing location uses an outdated (2017) map that does not show the new Monymusk housing estates (St. Thomas & St. Andrews) and also the proposed new estate next to the School. You should consider using in-date maps?

If you allow a new downhill centre to be built at Pitfichie then 90% of participants must travel through the already congested centre of Monymusk Village to attend. Using Tarland biking centre as a yardstick - it has on average 40,000 bikers per year (56,000 last year!) so this new Monymusk biking centre would generate more than 2,000 extra cars/vans each weekend in the summer months! Indeed there is also a very bad junction at the top of the Village where cars/vans have to negotiate the Toll House that blocks views up the road. There have already been accidents there over the years that may generate fatalities with increased use.

I believe that the Forestry Commission should be considering the impact on the local community and surroundings, rather than acquiescing to one groups demands.

I think your Department should look long and hard at this proposed development and take into account the groundswell of anger locally that would be generated if you allow it to go ahead.

Yours Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
 To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
 Cc: secretarycmmcc@gmail.com
 Subject: Objection to the proposed downhill biking centre at Pitfichie Hill Monymusk
 Date: 19 August 2026 18:32:47

To whom it may concern,

[REDACTED]

Monymusk is a peaceful estate village which, although it has grown over the years, retains its charm and tranquility.

Whilst with an increase of houses over time there has been a noticeable increase in traffic and people parking on the street especially in and around the square, the proposed biking centre will inevitably further increase the amount of traffic going through the village. I feel that this will not only disrupt the quiet for residents but will also cause potential for accidents. Whilst most drivers are considerate and observe speed limits I fear that an influx of outsiders and larger vehicles will increase danger especially for younger pedestrians, notably those walking between homes and school, playpark and village hall.

I have read the entire proposal and supporting documents as published on the FLS website. I am left with the feeling that a lot of the concerns that have been raised previously have been brushed off or dismissed by GNE and that some of their supporting information is at best sketchy. My main issues are surrounding the access, facilities, environmental proposals and impact on local communities.

As mentioned I have concerns for the increase in traffic that the proposed centre will bring based on their projected visitor numbers. Visitor transport will inevitably have to pass through the village to reach the centre and then return. I feel that more robust and updated traffic surveys are needed to show the impact on usual traffic numbers when an event is held especially. I cannot help but feel that if this all goes through then, at some point in the future, there will be call for traffic calming measures throughout the village to stop speeding on what is a relatively straight stretch of road through the village and that this will be required on the back of an accident or incidents caused by the increase in traffic and potential speeding. This will no doubt be both unsightly and inconvenient for residents of Monymusk.

There is no real mention of the time and expected resources for construction other than projected budget and that they will use local contractors. Construction vehicles would also need to pass through the village, again causing disruption and danger to residents as well as potential damage to local roads associated with this type of heavy traffic. There is no indication of time frame for this and no mention of potential for remedial works to existing local roads on the back of the construction and where funding would come from for this.

Much mention is made of the fact that they anticipate an increase in biodiversity in the corridors around the trails. I appreciate that this may come with time and careful management but without a thorough survey of the existing wildlife in the area, especially red squirrels and bats, this all appears to be bandstanding. You can't prove an increase without having a sound knowledge of what exists there already. I know from personal sightings of birds and mammals that there is a wide variety of wildlife in the area. The proposal to vary the height of trees along the trails without a proper survey of these local and in many cases rare residents seems like unnecessary vandalism at best. There is limited information within the proposal about the construction of the trails. Are these to be natural or hardcore or compacted gravel? Do they involve levelling, removal of tree stumps/roots or other groundworks? Each scenario will cause differing impact to the existing environment during construction and beyond and could potentially create artificial barriers to movement of wildlife between areas of the Pitfichie Hill. Whilst much mention is made of water concerns I don't feel that groundworks are addressed in enough detail to quantify the effect they may have on the existing environment and wildlife. With regards to water there needs to be proper surveying of amphibians to mitigate any detrimental effects to their environment also. Creating 'scrapes' seems like a bit of an afterthought to appease any objectors.

The car park proposed would on paper seem like a good solution to deal with the proposed number of visitors using the facility. Again I have concerns over the construction of this and the detrimental effects the traffic will cause to local residents as well as the environmental issues of the groundworks involved. Any wide flat area of the size envisioned will create a wildlife desert in the midst of the forest unless it is well thought out. I imagine there may be issues with waterlogging or run off potentially with Scottish rainfall. The proposal mentions a car parking charge (which presumably will constitute pay machines), cctv and toilets. What groundworks will be required to support the electricity and water works required for these? Again I have concerns around the construction traffic required for this. If electrics are being provided are they also looking at chargers for EVs? What mitigations will be in place for the numerous power cuts that occur in the locality especially through winter months? How will parking charges be enforced? If they are not enforced, how much does the proposed budget for income allow for this? The 25% non paying expectation seems low as if there's no enforcement I imagine no one will pay. If there is enforcement perhaps through the proposed cctv then what's to stop people parking along the main road to avoid

charges? This being a not unreasonable scenario what consideration has been given to how that will affect local residents when the main road from the village effectively becomes single carriageway? There does not seem to be a robust solution to the idea that people may choose to camp in the car park other than signs and that the barriers might get closed at night. Campers are fairly notorious for leaving rubbish behind and then there is the potential for starting of forest fires - topical with all the current issues throughout the UK, including Scotland.

The other source of income mentioned in the proposal is from the uplift vehicles. I understand the idea behind this but feel the details are deliberately sketchy as with any thought they do not support the environmental benefits claimed by the proposal. What type of vehicles are we talking about? Will they be electric? Where will they be stored? Who will carry out maintenance? Conveniently one of GNE's trustees is in vehicle maintenance - what conflicts of interest exist between the proposals and the charity's trustees? These vehicles will necessarily have to be large enough to carry bikes and riders. They are also going to be using the trails which brings me back to construction of the trails. To support large vehicles on a regular basis these will have to be of a size and build that will require substantial groundworks. What about water runoff? Turning space at the top of the trail to allow the vehicles to return back to the hub? There is mention of drivers having to stop away from trail users and allowing them to pass - a 2m wide trail does not readily allow for this especially when the user could be a person, a biker or a horse rider. What about passing places? Frequency of these along the trail? How will these impacts on the biodiversity of the corridors surrounding the trails?

There is mention of an events calendar and of potential for varying sizes of events. Where will the mentioned overflow parking be sited? What traffic controls will be put in place? How will after event clean ups be managed? What about first aid facilities? Access for emergency vehicles? Outwith events are there plans for defibs, bleed kits, any other considerations for the remote location and potential for trauma through the increase in users anticipated? With a variety of types of users anticipated potential for collisions with high speed trail bikes is likely. Mobile phone signal is also very sporadic in the locality so calling for emergency services may not be possible. How will use of trails by scramblers or other motor vehicles be prevented?

Littering and antisocial behaviour rightly came up on the list of objections and concerns from local people. The proposal includes provision of bins and a requirement to empty these daily and to check the car park weekly. Bins in the car park area may help address the issue to an extent. Will there be further bins along the trails? How many bins and what capacity? Where will the rubbish be taken when they are emptied? Will there be separate bins for recycling to encourage this? What mitigations will there be for potential fires from discarded cigarettes or disposable bbqs? Will there be regular checks of the trails for litter or will these fall to local groups to organise in response to large amounts of litter left by the increased amount of visitors? Will there be litter picking equipment for ploggers or others to use if necessary? There is mention of potential cctv, is this to try and prevent antisocial behaviour and vandalism of toilet facilities? Will the toilets be available during certain times only? What facilities will there be for disabled access, baby changing, other users with special needs? Will cleaning jobs be offered to immediately local people or contractors from the Aberdeenshire area?

Circling back to the impact on local residents. I applaud GNE for having members who are part of the local community. I appreciate the 25 page document evidencing the local support for the proposal. The idea that the centre will bring revenue into the local area and provide a facility for young people to get involved in the sport is a positive of course. However as mentioned before they are doing a wonderful job of ignoring the objections from Monymusk and other local community residents. There is no balance to show the community's considered objections nor are there comprehensive answers to the queries put to GNE about the proposal. There is a small selection of questions and answers published in the proposal but in interests of fairness why not document all the questions raised rather than referencing a small bullet point list with broad subjects? I don't see how GNE can be trusted to become a valuable contributor to the local community with their centre if they don't take the time and effort to address all the concerns raised and document their responses publicly. Maybe they are unable to answer some of the queries or it doesn't suit their proposal to do so. Unfortunately for them without a transparent and inclusive approach to this they will continue to get objections from a concerned community who does not feel that they are being heard when they raise valid points. The community is rightly concerned about the impact this development will have on their village which many have chosen to live in based specifically on its charm and tranquility. The current proposal does not adequately or comprehensively address concerns being raised. I absolutely object to the proposal at this time.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Gravitate north East
Date: 19 August 2026 20:25:38

Hi

Just a quick note to say that I fully support the Gravitate project and believe it will be a great benefit to the mountain biking scene in the North East.

I have ridden at Pitfichie for a number of years and an uplift and well maintained car park and trails would be of real value, attracting riders from all over Scotland and beyond.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Objection to downhill centre at Pitfichie
Date: 19 August 2026 21:11:57

I object because of the following :

1: The route to Pitfichie Hill passes through the small village of Monymusk and its primary school and children's playground. Therefore the increase in traffic poses an increased danger.

2: The road to Pitfichie hill beyond Monymusk becomes narrow single track with very few passing places and sharp bends and is totally unsuitable for an increase in traffic.

3: Motorised vehicles will be needed to transport cyclists and their bikes to the top of Pitfichie hill. This will impact on wildlife in terms of noise and disturbance. There are protected species of birds, pine martins and bats in this area. It will deny access to walkers and horse riders.

4: Concerned about management of the car park , waste disposal and toilet facilities.

As there are already downhill trails in this area I see no reason why there should be any further development here. Downhill trails are available in Tarland, Deeside, The Lecht and Glenlivet. Surely it makes more sense to develop downhill trails in the ski resorts such as Glenshee which already have facilities in place to cope with increased traffic and people.

I have visited this area for many years to enjoy the walks, wildlife and tranquility. The Grant Arms has been a favourite place to eat and fond visits to the art centre and thrift shop.

Should this go ahead I will need to reassess my decision to visit Pitfichie as my experience will not be same ; freedom curtailed.



Sent from my iPad

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: secretarycmmcc@gmail.com
Date: 20 August 2026 13:34:48

Dear Sir/Madam

I wish to express my concern in relation to the proposed downhill biking centre at Pitfichie and the potential increase in traffic via the village of Monymusk.

[REDACTED] and would be concerned for the number of additional vehicles that the proposed development would bring.

In particular the access to the village from the B993 or in particular the number of vehicles attempting access onto the B993 from Monymusk and potential accidents that may occur.

Has there been any input from highways on the access into the village or for any traffic calming measures?

I understand that the downhill biking centre would bring added visitors to the village for local businesses and for local biking residents and enthusiasts and would enhance the viability of the Pitfichie forest but I would ask that those locals not necessarily directly benefiting from the proposed centre are given some say in this as its impact on them would be quite significant especially in the summer months.

Yours

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie Hill Bike Trails - Letter of Support
Date: 20 August 2026 18:09:34

To whom it may concern,

I would like to write to you to express my support for the Gravitare North East asset transfer request for a parcel of land at Pitfichie Hill, Monymusk.

I have been an active member of the Aberdeenshire mountain biking scene since [REDACTED]. I have been very impressed with the quality and variation of the trails available around Aberdeen, and Pitfichie has long been one of my favourite riding spots.

It was the location of [REDACTED] enduro race, where it was readily apparent that the trails are world-class and a huge range of people were able to enjoy them. That event was run from the centre of Monymusk, which worked well, but the proposal from Gravitare to have a dedicated car park and trail hub would make these kinds of events much easier to run and improve the experience for entrants.

I regularly visit the downhill tracks [REDACTED], and again, a better access road and dedicated car park would make this easier all-round. I do not doubt that the new trails that Gravitare are proposing will also be a welcome addition.

The success of Tarland Trails demonstrates how positive a venture like this can be for the community and the surrounding businesses.

I have followed the team behind Gravitare since their inception and have been impressed with their work ethic and commitment to stakeholder management. I am sure that they will be good custodians of the land and prove a net positive to the area.

Best regards,

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Community asset transfer - pitfichie - Gravitare North East.
Date: 21 August 2026 09:46:02

I would like to formally indicate my support for the proposed community asset transfer at Pitfichie.

I believe it to be a valid and exciting plan with has the potential to add value to the local amenities, economy and sporting success of, not alone, the Aberdeenshire community but of Scotland as a whole. It is a sore needed facility the likes of which require vast travel and investment for individuals and families alike. Bringing something like this to the area will be an incredible opportunity for a huge number of people.

Yours Faithfully,

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Cc: secretarycmmcc@gmail.com
Subject: Objection to proposed Pitfichie MTB Trails
Date: 21 August 2026 14:22:23

Good afternoon

My name is [REDACTED] and my address is [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. Although I don 't live in Monymusk I am a frequent visitor to the
Pitfichie area for the purpose of walking, jogging and mountain biking.

I object :

- because I believe that the proposal if implemented would considerably increase motor -traffic in the area of the Monymusk village and the single-track roads that surround it.
- because the proposed uplift facility would introduce noise and disturbance to wildlife into an otherwise quiet and tranquil area.
- because it would prevent access to paths and forest areas by walkers and other users.

Regards

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
 To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
 Subject: Representation for Pitfichie Hill bike trails and car park
 Date: 21 August 2026 18:40:10

To whom it may concern,

I am writing in response to the plans for new bike trails and car park in Pitfichie. I am in full support of these plans. I enjoy cycling at Pitfichie, [REDACTED].

I have read the associated paperwork and can see the main concerns of those opposing the plans and wish to counter argue some of these points.

Traffic and disruption.

When I want to cycle on the existing trails in the area of interest, myself and friends park in the Monymusk Square as I know many others do. I have always felt uncomfortable doing this as this parking would be best utilised by people visiting The Grant Arms and The Studio. The plans to have designated parking for the cycle trails will take this parking congestion out of the heart of the village.

Environmental and wildlife concerns.

This is a topic dear to me. However, after reading the biodiversity plans it is clear to see that there are only benefits to be found. The land is mainly clear felled plantation forest which if not taken over by Gravitare North East will be replanted with nonnative trees. The plans details how they want to support habitat diversity and improve biodiversity.

Waste and behaviour concerns.

Vandalism, Respect of the land.

Although these concerns cannot be addressed with tangible evidence, in my experience mountain bikers have an inherent respect of the land they are cycling in. I frequently have to collect litter from walkers at the top of Bennachie but never have to do this on bike specific trails. I am aware that there has been cases of vandalism in Monymusk this year, I hope that this development would give those individuals a place to occupy themselves which is exciting and fun.

[REDACTED] and have the privilege of accessing beautiful countryside [REDACTED]. I feel these plans will only improve this. Although Monymusk is a small community I hope to find connection with the residents and those that visit. These plans have the opportunity to create and strengthen a community.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]

 This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.



21st August 2026

Dear Sir

PITFICHIE BIKE TRAILS – COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER REQUEST BY GRAVITATE NORTH EAST

I am a resident of the area adjoining the Pitfichie Hill / Cairn William area of Aberdeenshire. I am a regular user of the forests and hills of the area for walking and running. I have read the documents provided on your web site concerning the proposed CAT of land to GNE for the purpose of developing additional mountain bike trails on Pitfichie Hill.

I object to the proposals for the following reasons:

1. **Lack of clear benefit to local community.** There is no indication of how these proposals will benefit the residents of the local community. All the benefits reside with the incoming mountain bikers who will cause an increase in traffic through Monymusk village and on small access roads. GNE highlight this in their application – *“Through the planning process, we expect there will be a requirement to improve the longer section of single track road, including adding passing places”*. Who will fund, and maintain, these road improvements ?
In the Evidence of Community Support section, GNE highlight that local residents expressed concerns about noise, litter and damage from recent enduro events. They have not shown how this can be prevented with increased activity.
The GNE Open Forums were not well publicised. Their surveys have not shown adequate levels of support from the local community. Indeed, if those who responded as cautious/neutral were to convert to objectors you would have 50% opposition to the proposals.
2. **Sustainability of the project.** GNE have not demonstrated any track record to support their ability to successfully initiate or manage the project. They appear to have been trying to achieve such a project since 2015 with no success. Their latest filed accounts with OSCR do not show any substantial reserves and their funding model is not convincing in the longer term. Basing income on a 50 week year is not realistic in North East Scotland given weather conditions. The SCIO currently only has 3 trustees and 25 members (including 2 juniors) which is a poor representation of the MTB and local communities. Although they claim to have had 210 members at one time they state in the Evidence of Community Support *“The trustees decided to recruit a limited membership of local people that could support their decision making in the Pitfichie area”*. Three trustees and 25 members is not a robust model to support a project of this magnitude.
I believe that, if this CAT is approved by FLS, they will find that the project is economically unsustainable and that it will close once initial grant funding ceases. FLS will have no income and the community will be left with an unmanaged eyesore.

3. **Environmental Concerns.** The Biodiversity Plan talks of GNE managing corridors of 40m width beside the trails. There is no evidence in the business plan as to how this will be funded, and certainly there is no allocation of recurrent funds towards environmental maintenance staffing. All the financial support is towards the actual MTB activity, uplift vehicles, car parks, toilets etc. There is an unrealistic reliance upon local volunteer groups maintaining the hillside and, although there will undoubtedly be enthusiasts who will maintain the tracks and biking infrastructure, Bikers from outside the local area will have no interest in providing environmental support at a local level. GNE's commitment to the wider long-term environmental issues has not been demonstrated in the application.

There appears to be some indecision as to where car parking will be located.

It is stated that the uplift vehicles will share forest roads with other users and will be travelling at a speed of **15mph** which is far too fast to ensure safe shared space.

Although Pitfichie is a relatively quiet area of forest, the safety and provision of quiet country space for all current users should be protected.

It is inconceivable that such a development, with motorised vehicles and increased activity, will not have an adverse effect upon the wildlife of the area.

I would request that Forestry Land Scotland do not approve the proposed CAT as detailed in the application.

Yours sincerely



From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Proposed Downhill Mountain Biking Centre at Pitfichie Forest
Date: 22 August 2026 17:34:47

Hi,

I'm writing to object to the proposed transfer. I don't live in the immediate area but visit regularly to enjoy a peaceful walk with excellent views well away from traffic. I list below my reasons for objecting.

The proposed motorised uplift will destroy the peace on a significant section of one of the main walking routes.

The increased number of mountain bikers higher up on narrow paths will lead to conflict between bikers and pedestrians and it will only be a matter of time before an accident occurs.

I am worried that the proposed massive expansion of the existing mountain bike trails will lead to excessive traffic and noise in the quiet Monymusk village.

This increased traffic will lead to road safety issues. At present, the village is a peaceful rural settlement where children can play safely. This will change irrevocably at the proposed traffic levels.

This development is not part of the approved Local Development Plan for very good reason. I am not against development of mountain biking facilities, but they need to be in the appropriate places, not disrupting a quiet village.

I am concerned that the proposed business plan seems overly optimistic. I doubt whether the proposed number of bikers will materialise. There are only a limited number of mountain bikers who will pay for uplift. Additional centres will simply dilute the income across all sites. I suggest that it is very likely that FLS will end up using taxpayers' money to subsidise Gravitare North East.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [Aberdeenshire Trail Association](#)
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Gravitate North East CAT; Pitfichie
Date: 23 August 2026 18:48:24

Dear FLS team,

Please accept this email as endorsement, from Aberdeenshire Trail Association (ATA), of Gravitate North East (GNE)'s CAT application for the proposed trail development and management at Pitfichie.

The ATA was formed to directly support the formal trail assets of Aberdeenshire and began its existence at Pitfichie. This foundation allowed the ATA to expand community adoption of trails and positively influence the wider Aberdeenshire Trail Network. In 8 years the ATA has risen to international status as a driving force in community involvement, especially in the subjects of unauthorised trails and future sustainable trail planning.

We see the GNE proposal as a positive and evolutionary step in this community custodianship and welcome the initiative. We are impressed with the approach that mountain biking is being developed within the democratic planning processes, which means attention must be paid to a range of local and national policy factors. We are also pleased that GNE have elevated the need for wider community consultations and have calmly listened to non-mountain bike community questions, and aimed to embed adjustments, avoidance, and mitigations into their design.

The ATA is aware of several case studies of economic rural diversification via formal mountain bike infrastructure. As Pitfichie is unlikely to be maintained or developed from the public purse, initiatives such as GNE seem a positive pathway.

The ATA is pleased to report that GNE would value the input of our volunteers in the maintenance of their proposed trails. In turn this would benefit the ATA through direct fundraising, and our ability to reach a wider audience in the education of trail advocacy. We believe this would have a wider positive effect to the region, not just Pitfichie hill. As it stands, the ATA involvement at Pitfichie has reduced unauthorised trail digging, but we cant completely prevent this culture, and at Pitfichie we feel that this comes with unmanageable risks to the natural environment. We feel that formal GNE community custodianship may be the required next step in reducing unauthorised trail work to its potential minimum.

The ATA are pleased to see elements in their proposal such as biodiversity management and monitoring. We think if allowed to progress as intended, then this could be an exemplar project of multi-use woodland management, hitting several objectives.

In summary, the ATA would support GNE in the objectives to evolve the historic Downhill Trails of Pitfichie. This trail network has already supported the development of young riders to reach competitive standards at the world stage. This is a positive for the region and provides young people with the inspiration to develop their skills further.

Kindest regards
Aberdeenshire Trail Association

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
 To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
 Subject: Pitfichie- Gravitare
 Date: 24 August 2026 10:46:01
 Attachments: [image001.png](#)

Morning,

Just a quick note of support for the proposed bike trails at Pitfichie, operated by gravitate.

Northeast Scotland has a lack of progressive downhill riding, particularly served by uplifts.

Riders would have to travel to Glen Coe or Fort William currently which are only open seasonally and are weather dependent being ski lifts (often closing at short notice) or into Tweed Valley to use a reliable uplift service which is not viable for younger riders especially.

The UK produced many elite downhill racers through the 2000-2010's including Scottish Ruardih Cunningham winning the Junior World Championships in 2007 in Scotland.

Since then participation has increased significantly with new enduro and XC/ "bike park" venues which is great, but there is a significant drop in UK elite riders which correlates with the loss of these more progressive venues.

Gravitates proposal and Pitfichies existing offering seems to offer a real breadth of trails so will offer progression without being "elitest".

Other towns in the northeast and throughout Scotland (Tarland, Ballater, Aboyne, Banchory, Peebles, Innerleithen) have seen real economic benefits from increased mountain bike visits with existing accommodation, pubs/ cafes/ shops etc seeing increased foot fall and many vacant units hosting new businesses such as bike shops, cafes, microbreweries etc opening and even several new brands creating equipment and moving into disused high streets.

It would be fair to assume that Monymusk and the surrounding towns would benefit from any increase in local spending.

The recently clear-felled area is poorly managed with western hemlock regenerating vigorously, areas still not restocked, drainage in poor condition following harvesting, areas of windblow left behind and brown edges continuing to blow etc.

Bringing machinery onto the hill for construction could aid in reinstating some of this damage and third party management would likely see improvements to biodiversity.

There would be further opportunities to improve biodiversity e.g. by creating ponds around "borrow pits" and using the transfer to support multi partner/ interest parties' engagement within Gravitates management area.

Whilst this obviously isn't their primary aim, their involvement in ATA etc has show a willingness to contribute not to just manage their own interests.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]



27

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Letter in Support of Gravitate's CAT Application for Pitfichie
Date: 25 August 2026 12:29:36

Hi,

I would like to voice my support for the development.

I have been mountain biking regularly in the Pitfichie forest [REDACTED]. I am a local resident [REDACTED], all of whom also enjoy mountain biking there. My work is related to mountain biking ([REDACTED]).

Mountain bike is a great sport with many benefits; it is an inclusive sport that promotes health and fitness, connects people with the outdoors and offers many opportunities for employment.

Gravitate's proposal would be unique in this part of the country. It would be of great benefit to my family, and I believe, would be positive for the local area in terms of attracting visitors and supporting local businesses.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie Bike Trail Aberdeenshire
Date: 25 August 2026 12:34:15

I would like to register my objections to the above Bike trail on the3 following grounds.

1. Litter may be controlled on event days but what about other days?

2.I note the information regarding wild life but some is very out of date and I express my concern that a proper survey is not being done now.

3.The damage cause by the bike uplift vehicle to habitats and the ground generally.

4. The access road and local residents on or near that road are going to be affected by noise and increased traffic
Also some drivers may not be familiar with single track roads.

If there was someone living up this road who needed urgently to get out is there a system in place for this to happen? Eg Emergency Care worker Paramedic or other.

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie community asset transfer
Date: 25 August 2026 12:36:23

Hello

I am a local resident to Pitfichie and [REDACTED] from the location of the proposed community asset transfer.

I would like to send you my thorough support for this proposal.

I use the forest at Pitfichie at least once per week and feel that siting a proper car park will be beneficial to the management of the existing trails, make access safer and accessible for more people. The additional trails will benefit the local cycling community and bring new visitors to the area.

Given the proximity to several other established riding destinations, I feel any concerns about crowding are overblown and the finite pool of riders will still be spread wide across Aberdeenshire at any given time.

Thanks

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: 
 To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
 Subject: Gravitate North East Pitfichie mountain bike development
 Date: 25 August 2026 14:11:16

Dear Sir/Madam

I write to object to the Gravitate North East proposed downhill mountain bike development at Pitfichie. The sell, seems to be about a car park with trails. It's so much more than that.

I do not believe the application meets any quality threshold for a business case; in particular one requiring public funding.

My representation therefore takes the form of key concerns and questions about:

- return on investment
- risk mitigation
- recurring costs and
- clarity on the **improved amenity for local people and businesses**

I believe the points and questions below need to be addressed to meet a transparent public consultation process.

Public Consultation

Consultation must be carried out with goodwill and serious consideration of all points of view. I am concerned that, in some instances, community opinion has not been adequately considered or addressed.

I am also concerned to ensure that presentation of community feedback and local opinion is fully included and not watered down for presentation purposes.

1. ***How and when were option appraisals for alternative sites carried out, concluded and shared? This should include criteria for assessing the options.***
2. ***Why has Pitfichie been identified and not other sites already offering outdoor pursuit activities, for example, the Tarland Trails, Whitehill and the Lecht?***

Road safety

Pedestrians: The proposal has based its impact assessment on the B933 and not the Monymusk village road layout and high community pedestrian footfall with limited footpaths. The primary school, nursery and play park are particular concerns. It is acknowledged that there is already a 20 mph speed restriction. However, let it also be acknowledged that this is not necessarily adhered to and the obvious increase in speed going into and out of the derestricted part of the road that is of specific risk for trail walkers following the Monymusk, River Don and Clyan's Dam route.

1. ***Can additional footpaths, or crossings be built to ensure safety of all road users along the entire stretch of the road leading out of village towards Blairdaff?***

Access: The development represents a major change of use to one that involves a *commercial* downhill racing venue. The intended associated commercial uplift of vehicles is not enumerated to assess the risk for all the different types of users currently using the shared forestry roads.

1. ***How do the plans mitigate the increased risk to existing walkers, horse riders, runners, families and existing recreational cyclists?***
2. ***What safety measures will be included to prevent existing users access rights to public forest being undermined?***

Public amenity

Natural environment: The current quiet, multi-use recreational dimensions of Pitfichie have not been addressed. Not least the increased vehicle movements, the introduction of large commercially organised events, uplift operations and increased visitor numbers negatively affecting local wildlife.

1. ***How will the necessary ground work and ongoing maintenance of the course be managed to minimise and prevent permanent landscape and environmental scarring and damage?***
2. ***What has been identified as a passive or carbon neutral impact assessment?***
3. ***How will noise, capacity, and light levels be controlled and monitored?***

Putting local communities first: The request seeks considerable and important public funding without similarly describing the benefits to local people and business from any return on public and local amenity investment. The request also relies heavily on uplift revenue, optimistic visitor projections and grant funding for a specialist and expensive activity for a relatively privileged cohort without fully explaining what the threshold is for the long term business model to continue as a successful business.

1. ***Beyond the investment for development, where is the financial sustainability of the request described?***
2. ***Where can the risk assessment about the risks of failure of the project be found? This is in relation to both environmental impact and potential loss of investment?***
3. ***What are the plans to allow local schools and organisations agreed access at off-peak times to any of the facilities?***

I look forward to a considered response to my concerns and questions as part of this public consultation.

Yours faithfully

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Cc: secretarycmmcc@gmail.com
Subject: Objection to downhill biking centre at Pitfichie Hill, Monymusk
Date: 25 August 2026 19:32:00

I object to the proposed plan for a downhill biking course on Pitfichie Hill for the following reasons:

1. All visitors will use the single track road from Monymusk passing Pitfichie Castle. This cul de sac road is not suitable for the proposed volume of traffic.
2. I have lived in the Alford area for over 40 years and enjoyed walking and exercising dogs on the Pitfichie forest tracks over many years. Cyclists behave as if walkers have no rights to be there and are expected to keep out of the way.
3. There is a high probability that litter on the road and in the forest will be an issue.

Regards
[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Cc: secretarycmmcc@gmail.com
Subject: Objection to downhill centre at Pitfichie
Date: 25 August 2026 20:59:27

I object to the above plan for a number of reasons. Having lived in the Alford area for many years and enjoyed hill-walking all over this spectacular area, it is already being ruined by some cyclists dangerously out of control on the hill with no respect for walkers or their dogs.

I also feel this plan will have a negative impact on the historic, peaceful village of Monymusk for whom there is little benefit and the narrow roads are unsuited to the high volume of cars and large vehicles anticipated.

Regards
[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Cc: secretarycmmcc@gmail.com
Subject: Objection to downhill centre at Pitfichie
Date: 26 August 2026 08:39:25

As a resident [REDACTED], I object to the proposed downhill centre because of the disturbance the downhill biking events will have on both wildlife and residents with the GNE's estimate of 20,000 visitors annually, all who will drive through my village and add no economic value to the area. Also a 76 vehicle car park will scar the area. Therefore i fully object to this proposal.

[REDACTED]

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie Hill bike trails and car park
Date: 26 August 2026 20:42:17

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to express my strong support for Gravitare North East's proposal to develop mountain-bike trails, a riders' paddock and car park at Pitfichie Hill.

As a [REDACTED] and keen mountain biker, I see the benefits that good-quality, well-managed trails bring to both riders and the wider community. Pitfichie is already an established mountain-biking destination, and this proposal would provide improved facilities while helping manage access and parking responsibly.

The development would also benefit local businesses. Mountain bikers contribute to the local economy through bike sales and servicing, accommodation, food, fuel and other spending. Creating an attractive, well-managed facility has the potential to bring more visitors to the area and support the local outdoor economy.

The proposed facilities would provide opportunities for people to get involved in mountain biking, develop their skills and enjoy the outdoors in a safe and appropriate environment.

I believe this is a positive opportunity for Pitfichie and the surrounding community, and I strongly encourage Forestry and Land Scotland to support the proposal.

Thanks

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Application APP/2026/1295
Date: 26 August 2026 20:59:24

Dear Sir/Madam,

I would like to formally register my support to the application for the Gravitare North East to acquire the land at Pitfichie for the development of mountain bike facilities. I think it would be fantastic for the area and local economy.

Regards,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent from my iPhone

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.



Correspondence address:
 Soineann
 East Terrace
 Kingussie
 PH21 1JS

27/08/2026

To whom it may concern:

Letter of Support – Pitfichie Hill mountain bike trails

This is to confirm support from the Community Woodlands Association for the proposal for Gravitate North East (GNE) to lease land under the Forestry & Land Scotland (FLS) Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS) to establish 2 mountain bike trails and associated car-parking and 'marshalling' area at Pitfichie.

We recognise this development is the culmination of an extended period researching options for the design and location of mountain bike facilities in Aberdeenshire. It responds to the well-established demand for such facilities in the area. We understand that GNE was established based on the strength of the mountain bike community and the potential to develop formal facilities for riders at which to host events alongside existing trail facilities and informal facilities that use a combination of forest roads, hiking trails and desire lines.

Our communication with GNE has confirmed that there has been wide ranging community consultation, both within the area's mountain bike community and the local Pitfichie community, and that this has led to modifications to designs in order to meet the needs of both communities as well as possible. GNE has also demonstrated concern for environmental impacts in seeking advice from us, RSPB and others to ensure that habitat within their remit of management can be managed to support local wildlife.

We recognise that the trail development at Pitfichie is in partnership with FLS, in as much as they are willing to lease the land for the trail development and associated facilities and work around the facility to continue plantation management in terms of re-planting and future tree harvesting. We expect that the facility will help consolidate Aberdeenshire as a destination for cyclists and more general recreation. It will be an asset that GNE, FLS and the local community can be proud of.

I hope this project receives the funding it needs and I look forward to hearing more about it in due course and promoting the facility to our members.

Best wishes,



Senior Woodland Officer

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Cc: secretarycmmcc@gmail.com
Subject: Objection to Pitfichie Hill Bike Trails land transfer
Date: 30 August 2026 21:44:02

Dear Sir/Madam

I note with great concern the proposal for a land transfer to facilitate the rental of FLS land by Gravitare North East (GNE) to create a downhill biking centre.

I object to this transfer because I do not believe that the volume of traffic, and associated parking arrangements, are acceptable in this quiet rural environment. Looking through the documents supplied by GNE it is obvious that we will see a significant increase in car/van traffic on roads which are simply not suitable for such levels. The lane which runs from the Pitfichie crossroads to the location of the proposed car park is only single track with very few passing places. This arrangement has been acceptable to myself as a local resident who often uses this road since there is currently very little traffic on it, but when GNE are talking about 20,000 visitors per annum it is obvious that this will now become a thoroughfare which is overwhelmed by the challenges of meeting traffic with no obvious places to pass. This concern about increased traffic levels also extends to the single track road running from Blairdaff to the Arthur Grant Centre, which will suffer increased usage from traffic serving the site from the Inverurie, Oldmeldrum, and Ellon, directions.

FLS has shown itself to be a good neighbour to us local residents, and I would ask that it elects to not impose such a major disruption to the local community by agreeing to the creation of this "world class facility" which will draw traffic from across the region to an area which is so unsuitable for it.

Please also note that I wish for my personal details to be redacted from any publicly available documents / websites.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

 This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Cc: secretarycmmcc@gmail.com
Subject: Pitfichie Hill Bike Trails Transfer of Land - Objection
Date: 30 August 2026 22:39:15

I wish to object to the application for a Transfer of FLS land to Gravitare North East to enable the creation of a mountain bike centre.

Whilst I recognise that informal trails have existed across the hill for a number of years, the stated plans for up to 20,000 visitors per year puts this proposal into a completely different scale of development. For people like myself who often travel along the road beyond Pitfichie castle, and who walk on the hill itself, this will result in volumes of traffic (both vehicular and on bikes) which is completely disruptive and inappropriate for such a quiet rural location.

The peace which I am presently able to enjoy whilst walking on the hill will be destroyed by what is amounting to an industrialisation of the area through this commercial enterprise. Access on the single track road between the car park and Pitfichie Crossroads will be made extremely difficult due to the lack of passing places and the massive increase in traffic. I note that GNE's proposal makes no mention of any contribution to the already hard-pressed Aberdeenshire Council roads budget in order to facilitate the creation of improving the road access issues.

Whilst the creation of a car park for users of Pitfichie Hill is a welcome solution to the current situation where cars are often left in places which block access to the forest trails for FLS vehicles (and potentially Emergency Services vehicles), the intention to introduce a charge for the car park means that the "wild parking" issue will just shift to even more unsuitable locations whilst people seek to avoid paying the charge. It also means that those of us who presently access the hill for free will, in the future, end up paying GNE for the privilege of accessing what is presently a publicly owned hill by having to pay them a parking charge. I suspect that parking places such as the access into Paradise Wood will no longer be available to walkers such as myself due to mountain bikers seeking to avoid the parking fees in their own purpose built car park. There are also a number of large farm vehicles which use the single track road, and should parking on the verges become another fee-avoiding habit, access for these vehicles will become a major issue. In simple terms, the road to the car park from Pitfichie crossroads is not suitable for the creation of a mountain biking centre at any point along its length.

The GNE documents are also not totally clear about whether the car park will be locked each night. A car park in such a remote location will be an attractive spot for anti-social behaviour such as unmanaged car meets. Whilst the initial enthusiasm for supporting the GNE activities by their volunteers will undoubtedly be present in the early days, it is doubtful that GNE will be able to provide absolute assurance that car park gates will be locked EVERY night, thereby also avoiding the opportunity for this to become an informal overnight motorhome site.

You will note that at no point am I suggesting that mountain biking should cease on Pitfichie Hill. The current arrangements work well for all users of the hill and its neighbours (although some more disciplined parking would be welcome), but the intention of GNE to effectively take over access to the hill and increase traffic volumes by a significant factor is detrimental to all other users of the hill and the roads nearby. Despite the obvious opportunity for FLS to gain some income from this proposal, I strongly believe that you should decline this transfer application on the basis of the detriment that it causes to your other visitors and neighbours.

Please ensure that my personal details are redacted from any publicly accessible documents or websites.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

 This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Cc: secretarycmmcc@gmail.com
Subject: Proposed Downhill Biking Centre on Pitfichie Hill
Date: 31 August 2026 10:16:38

I object to the proposed downhill biking centre on Pitfichie Hill.

I live in the village of Monymusk and all traffic in and out of the village [REDACTED].

An extra 20,000 visitors per annum will add to the potential danger for pedestrians moving around the village. I am particularly concerned for the children, many of whom live on the opposite side of the road from the play park. [REDACTED] crossing the road on foot, on bikes or on scooters when they go to the play park to meet friends and to enjoy using the play equipment.

In addition, I am concerned because the project is described as being a 'world class' downhill biking centre. That will, no doubt, result in the organising of regional and national standard downhill biking competitions. Competitors and spectators attending these competitions will further increase the volume of traffic through the village and will exacerbate problems for children and pedestrians crossing the road. Such high standard competitions will likely be held over weekends and during holidays when the village children are most likely to be using the play park.

Competitors and spectators attending these events could be staying overnight on the hill in campervans and tents. This would add to the already significant disruption for neighbours and for folk using the hill for walking, cycling and horse riding. [REDACTED] have used the hill for all of these activities and so are very aware of how upsetting it will be if the proposed downhill biking centre on Pitfichie Hill goes ahead.

I trust that good sense will prevail and that the proposal will be rejected.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

 This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Objection to the Proposed Downhill Centre on Pitfichie Hill by Gravitare North East. (aabove proposal by (GNE).
Date: 02 September 2026 14:51:13

Dear Sir,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

I object to the above proposal by GNE because:

The Pitfichie Road has always been favoured by walkers and road cyclists and in the past years has already seen an increase in (often speeding) road traffic as well as regular agricultural related vehicles which has increased the risk to said walkers and cyclists

and I have in the past raised safety concerns with the police. The possible major increase to traffic volume by vehicles heading to downhill centre at Pitfichie will significantly increase the risk factor to all road users.

The single-track road from the crossroads on B993 towards Pitfichie is totally unsuitable for the increased traffic the proposal would bring and would severely disadvantage Pitfichie residents and farming community. The same increased traffic levels through the village of Monymusk which can already be congested with Village Hall and church events would be detrimental to the village and its residents and there would be no meaningful benefit to the village either

The building of a 76 vehicle car park, toilets and use of uplift vehicles can only adversely affect the environment, wildlife + walking, cycling facilities.

Given the increasing impact of climate change and wildfires suffered this year (smoke from Cairngorm wildfires reached Monymusk) increased vehicle traffic, use of uplift vehicles, the possibility of clandestine campfires, BBQs etc - the unwanted risk of wildfires cannot be discounted.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Objection to Downhill Centre at Pitfichie
Date: 02 September 2026 19:03:59

I object to this proposal for the following reasons -

- The access road through Monymusk village (C121C) is a narrow road, already heavily used by walkers, road cyclists (especially at weekends), runners, dog walkers, parents with push chairs and buggies, cars, lorries and large agricultural vehicles and therefore adding 20,000 extra visitors per year could have serious implications regarding overcrowding and potential accidents.
- Serious concerns about the use of Pitfichie Hill for a downhill cycle track, giving adrenaline 'highs' to cyclists who can't cycle uphill, at the expense of walkers, horse riders, runners and mountain bikers who already use the hill.
- No economic benefit whatsoever to Monymusk Village and its residents.
- Damage to flora and fauna and their habitats from additional cycle tracks and numerous 'events' in an already fragile environment.
- Use of uplift vehicles (petrol/Diesel powered?) and resultant air pollution.
- Creation of a large carpark in the forest, increasing noise pollution (see above) and spoiling a beautiful, tranquil area.
- Disruption to residents of the area with particular concern about an increase in speeding vehicles (there is a straight stretch of road just before the proposed development where speeding is common)
- Concerns about forest fires, greatly in the news this summer. Smoke from the Cairngorm fire earlier in the summer impacted the Monymusk area from a distance of about 50 miles away. People will inevitably make use of portable barbeques which could have disastrous outcomes.
- Litter, already a major problem in Aberdeenshire, will inevitably increase because where there are people who do not reside in the area there will be an increase in litter.

From

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

The above concerns are just some of the objections I have to this proposal. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] and I fear serious disruption [REDACTED] if
this proposal goes ahead. I have lived here [REDACTED], I love the area and would be greatly saddened to see any
deterioration of amenities because of permission granted to GNE for the above development.

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Objection to proposed downhill biking centre at Pitfichie
Date: 03 September 2026 16:46:39

Dear Sir or Madam,

Re: Proposed downhill biking centre at Pitfichie

I am writing to object to the plans for a downhill biking centre at Pitfichie.

Over my whole life I have visited the beautiful and currently tranquil Paradise Wood at the foot of Pitfichie Hill as well as the surrounding area. This includes Monymusk village, the river and land near Monymusk House and Pitfichie Castle.

The introduction of a large number of visitors with all the associated motor and non-motorised traffic and infrastructure would destroy the peaceful and unspoilt natural setting. It would also have a detrimental effect on the wildlife of the area. I strongly object to the proposal for these reasons.

I regularly spend significant lengths of time living and working nearby at [REDACTED]. This includes walking in the area.

Please could you acknowledge receipt of this email objecting to the plans.

Yours faithfully,

[REDACTED]

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From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie Downhill Mountain Bike Trails Objection
Date: 04 September 2026 16:54:07

Re: Pitfichie Hill Downhill Mountain Bike Trails Development

From: [REDACTED]

AGAINST PROPOSAL

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to express my concerns about the proposed development of downhill mountain bike trails at Pitfichie Hill by Gravitare North East, and to formally place my objection for the following reasons.

First and foremost is the weight of the projected increase in traffic through the village of Monymusk, and surrounding narrow and single track roads. Gravitare North East (GNE) state in their proposal that they estimate 20,000 visitors per year, the majority of whom will arrive via the village, by car, van or camper van.

The road through Monymusk village is entirely residential, with many families with young children living directly along its route. There is also a Primary School, the entrance of which is situated between two bends in the road, and a Playgroup, situated in the village hall [REDACTED]

[REDACTED], but I strongly believe that extra traffic through the village will put our children at risk. [REDACTED] a number of reports by parents, of near misses on their walk either to or from Playgroup.

[REDACTED] I see many examples of drivers not adhering to the 20mph speed limit, and would like it noted that the flashing school sign was removed last year.

In addition, I believe that extra traffic will put young children crossing the road to access the play park at risk. Monymusk is situated within a large area of farmland, and the roads are regularly used by tractors, cattle lorries, combine harvesters etc. With a regular influx of visiting vans and campervans, congestion and frustrated driving behaviours are inevitable.

I object to the use of diesel uplift vehicles, which will be running from Thursdays to Sundays, from the proposed site of the hub, along the single track road, and up onto the hill. This use of diesel uplift entirely negates the health benefits of pedalling uphill, and puts the emphasis of downhill mountain biking on thrill seeking and adrenaline. By contrast, Pitfichie Hill is currently enjoyed by many walkers, joggers, horse riders and cyclists, all of whom are currently able to co-exist and enjoy the health benefits of their chosen activities, confidently and safely. The presence of the uplift vehicles will make the hill especially dangerous for horse riders, whose horses may be easily spooked by the vehicles, and will risk the safety of walkers.

The plant and wildlife on Pitfichie Hill will inevitably be compromised by increased foot and wheeled traffic, in number, noise, and diesel pollution.

I object to the development of the site near Pitfichie Castle into a carpark with toilet facilities. GNE state that "This project will be an asset for the community, with proper car parking and toilets". These are not facilities either requested or needed by the village, and are being developed purely for the benefit of the visiting bike community. The two businesses within the village are unlikely to benefit financially. The Thrift Shop does not open at weekends, and The Grant Arms does not currently see use by those visiting the existing bike trails.

The carpark is to comprise 76 parking spaces. The majority of cyclists arrive by van, and it is anticipated that others will arrive by campervan. Each campervan, depending on size, will utilise at least two car parking spaces. Charging for parking will encourage those not wishing to pay, to seek to park for free in passing places, or in the village, and will inevitably cause congestion and poor visibility, and thus increase the risk of accidents.

The fact that the carpark will be "most likely locked when not in use" further proves that it is not intended as an asset for the community.

Of concern to me is the fact that in other tourist destinations, e.g. The Isle of Skye, it is reported that toilet facilities and surrounding wild areas are being contaminated by irresponsible disposal of blue toilet waste from camper vans. [REDACTED], who lives on Skye, regularly has waste from campers left in his bin.

The crossroads junction at the proposed site is a difficult junction, particularly when trying to cross from NE to SW, and I believe there is a high risk of accidents at the junction. I object to the removal of mature broadleaf trees. Since Storm Arwen, strides have been made across Aberdeenshire to reintroduce native and ancient trees and woodland, and the removal of healthy trees is unacceptable.

I object to over £800,000 of taxpayers' money being given to this project, specifically £500,000 from the Cycling Facilities Fund, £300,000 from the Just Transition Fund, and £50,000 from Aberdeenshire Council. At a time when our roads are in dire need of repair, and budgets are being cut in areas such as special needs support, these awards are entirely inappropriate.

I took part in the community survey, and was one of the 217 who objected to GNE's plans, but at no point was aware of any survey run by GNE.

GNE have previously stated that their proposal will bring a sense of pride to the village. That exists now - pride in a vibrant and supportive community, in safety, in tranquil, rural living, in family amenities and values. We do not believe that these will be enhanced in any way by the proposed bike trails.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie downhill biking centre.
Date: 06 September 2026 09:53:26

Dear Sir/Madam

As a resident of the area, I would like to make my objection to the above proposal known.

While there are many good reasons to encourage a healthy outdoor pursuit, which I do agree with, the siting of this proposal leaves a lot to be desired.

I can't think of a more inappropriate situation than inflicting a large amount of through traffic on the small and picturesque village of Monymusk, along with the congestion along the narrow road to the site. The carpark itself would cause an eyesore in such an unspoiled landscape by the river Don, at the beginning of the picturesque Lord's Throat.

Furthermore, there seems to be little consideration to the noise pollution from the amount of people and vehicles taking the bikers up Pitfichie hill, that may affect the local wildlife. Ospreys and the rare Noctule bat inhabit the area.

As a resident, I am concerned at upsetting the rural tranquility of this beautiful area. People come to enjoy the scenery and peaceful walks by the Don and do not want that experience spoiled by a raucous downhill event. More appropriate sites must be available, the Lecht with its existing infrastructure perhaps.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie Forest
Date: 06 September 2026 15:20:35

Dear Sir, I am alarmed to read of the proposal for a downhill cycle course on Pitfichie. Hill. Although I live outwith the immediate area I enjoy the hill for quiet walks with my dog and birdwatching and time in peaceful nature. Already familiar with cycle tracks at Plantain Loch near Dalbeattie where I am frequently disturbed by people dressed like Darth Vader who all act like they are delivering urgent time sensitive medical samples through the, often narrow, woodland tracks with little care for other users. Ask the locals in Dalbeattie about the benefits! There are few.

[REDACTED]

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From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Cc: secretarycmmcc@gmail.com
Subject: Objection to Gravitate North East Asset Transfer Request at Pitfichie Hill
Date: 07 September 2026 08:26:43

Good morning,

I wish to formally object to the proposed asset transfer application by Gravitate North East (GNE) relating to Pitfichie Hill.

Having reviewed the submitted documentation, I do not believe the proposal demonstrates that the development is financially viable, environmentally acceptable, socially beneficial or capable of being managed sustainably in the long term. There are substantial gaps, unsupported assumptions and unresolved risks throughout the application. Deficiencies with the application are presented below.

1. No Exit Strategy, Decommissioning Plan or Protection for the Public Finances

The application does not provide detail on decommissioning, restoration or an exit strategy should the project cease at any stage.

The proposal requires c. £1.1m of public funding, however no information is provided regarding:

- What happens if visitor numbers fail to materialise.
- What happens if the uplift service is not commercially viable.
- What happens if public funding is reduced.
- What happens if the charity ceases trading.
- Who would be responsible for removing infrastructure.
- Who would pay for restoring trails, parking facilities, signage, toilets and associated infrastructure.
- Who carries long-term environmental liabilities.
- How are private water supplies monitored
- What happens in the event of a vehicle oil spill
- In the event of a fire, which is foreseeable given the number of vehicles and DIY van conversions, how this will be managed and provisions to deal with a wildfire in the forest. The area is already identified as high risk.
- No information regarding the cost of emergency service mobilisations and the cost to the public of these - mountain biking is a dangerous sport with many serious injuries likely every year
- Increased cost of maintenance on the single track road which is weak, unsupported and totally unsuitable for a high volume of vans
- There is no emergency response plan in the proposal either and no agreements with the emergency services and local land owners to agree on where and how a rescue would take place
- No evidence is provided of discussions and agreements with emergency services in the event of a serious injury, accident or forest fire.

Who would pay costs associated with the above? The business case itself acknowledges uncertainty regarding visitor numbers, operating costs and uplift demand, yet no contingency arrangements have been provided. **It is wholly unacceptable to seek over £1 million in public investment without a clearly defined exit strategy. The public appears to assume all of the downside risk while the applicant carries little demonstrable risk.**

2. The Financial Case is Weak, Unproven and Based on Optimistic Assumptions

The proposal seeks £1.1 million in capital funding despite **only a very small proportion of that funding being secured**. The business model depends almost entirely on:

- Car parking income.
- Uplift vehicle income.
- Grant funding.
- Volunteer support.
- Forecast visitor numbers.

However, the application does not adequately explain:

- Whether 20,000 visitors is a conservative, central or optimistic estimate.
- The uncertainty associated with visitor forecasts.
- The effect of lower visitor numbers.
- The impact of adverse weather and number of days per year lost due to adverse weather (annually there will be at least 50 days due to snow and ice where it is not possible to operate uplift vehicles, and a significant number of days with poor weather where visitor numbers will be very low)
- The impact of forestry operations and felling.
- The impact of economic downturns or cost of living pressures.
- The impact of event cancellations.
- The impact of declining mountain biking participation.
- The impact of increasing maintenance and operating costs.
- The impact of failing to secure sponsorship and commercial partnerships.
- The impact of vandalism, theft or vehicle replacement costs.

It is particularly concerning that costs such as finance, administration, vehicle depreciation and long-term replacement do not appear to increase in a realistic manner despite inflation, increased activity and ageing infrastructure. The proposal assumes riders will regularly pay approximately £35 per day for uplift. For regular users this could amount to well over £1,500 per year. **There is no evidence that sufficient numbers of riders will pay these costs over the long term.** This is particularly pertinent given the cost of living crisis. **The application repeatedly refers to uncertainty in visitor numbers and uplift viability while simultaneously relying upon these assumptions to justify the development - this is not a robust business case.**

3. Biodiversity, Ecology, Water Environment and Environmental Risks Have Not Been Properly Assessed

The environmental information provided is wholly inadequate for a development of this scale. The proposal contains aspirational statements regarding biodiversity enhancement but provides little evidence to support them. Major concerns include:

- No meaningful biodiversity baseline.
- Insufficient protected species assessment.
- Failure to properly address private water supplies.
- No meaningful hydrological assessment.
- No runoff modelling.
- No assessment of trail erosion impacts.
- No assessment of contamination risks from vehicles.
- No assessment of contamination from bike maintenance activities.
- No adequate assessment of vehicle leaks, fuels or oils.
- No detailed information regarding toilet servicing and waste management.
- Limited environmental survey work.
- Reliance on a survey undertaken during winter conditions.

The proposal states that water features and seepage areas will be mapped and avoided. This is particularly concerning because it demonstrates such areas have not yet been comprehensively identified. The application therefore asks decision makers to approve development before understanding what environmental constraints exist. That approach is fundamentally backwards and there is no clear explanation regarding

- How protected species will be managed if discovered near trails.
- What operational restrictions may be required.
- The financial implications of these restrictions.
- What monitoring will be undertaken and the qualifications of those undertaking monitoring
- What corrective action will be taken if environmental harm is identified.

No member of GNE appears to possess specialist expertise in ecology, hydrology or environmental management and no evidence has been provided of specialist professionals being retained to oversee these matters and provide independent advice. There are schedule 1 protected species that inhabit Pitfichie Hill.

There is also no discussion on climate impacts associated with the developments construction, ongoing operation, maintenance or vehicle travel to the site - i.e., CO2e and pollutant emissions.

4. Community Support Has Been Significantly Overstated and is Misleading

The application repeatedly presents itself as a community-led development. However, the evidence supplied does not demonstrate widespread community support. GNE refers to:

- Social media followers.
- Photographs of events.
- Volunteer activity.
- Supportive comments from mountain bikers.

None of these represent evidence of broad community support and the GNE survey does not confirm where those who responded live. Most concerning is survey evidence where, despite being heavily weighted towards mountain biking interests, GNE's own consultation generated only a small number of responses and limited support (less than 50%). The proposal identifies through the above channels, GNE have an audience of thousands, however only 80 responded to the mountain biking survey. In contrast, an objective local community survey generated significantly greater participation (c. 250 responses) and demonstrated overwhelming opposition (c. 90%) to the development. The application therefore appears to place greater weight on the views of a relatively small mountain biking community than on the broader views of local residents who will live with the consequences of the development. There is also evidence that questions raised by residents were not fully answered, only a minority of submitted questions received responses and public engagement has been selective rather than comprehensive.

5. Serious Traffic and Road Safety Concerns

The local road network is entirely unsuitable for the level of traffic proposed. The roads serving Pitfichie Hill are narrow, weak in places, poorly aligned, have dangerous junctions, are unsuitable for increased vehicle traffic (especially large vans used by mountain bikers) and totally unsuitable for large scale events - this has been demonstrated on several occasions where due to events and the increased road usage, near misses have occurred with children cycling on roads and dangerous driving instances due to the local road layout.

The suggestion that traffic impacts are adequately understood is misleading. There have already been reports of vehicles parking in lay-bys, parking conflicts, near misses and dangerous manoeuvres. These incidents occurred during recent events. No demonstration has been made the traffic impacts have been quantified and no swept path analysis has been undertaken.

The proposal assumes visitor numbers of approximately 20,000 per year. However, there is no convincing evidence which supports this figure. Traffic impacts under normal operating conditions have not been adequately assessed and surveys undertaken during race events do not provide a reliable representation of day to day operations. The proposal also refers to creating passing places, however the land ownership of where these would be built is unclear, they have not been mapped, existing underground utilities/services may be impacted, technical feasibility not demonstrated and there is no evidence of agreements in place for passing places. The application cannot be approved until this has been resolved and matters understood in full. In addition, increased traffic will be routed through an area used by local families and school children. There appears to have been little meaningful engagement regarding these impacts. There is also no evidence provided of traffic impacts on neighbouring villages and towns, where traffic will increase significantly. It is clear that the development is not appropriate given the local road infrastructure and increasing traffic will only result in the likelihood of a serious accident and potential fatality - it is unacceptable to increase this risk.

6. The Claimed Economic Benefits Are Unproven and Misleading

The proposal repeatedly claims that the development will generate economic growth and tourism. However, no evidence has been provided that this represents genuinely new economic activity. Instead, the proposal appears far more likely to represent economic displacement. Many visitors are likely to come from Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire and existing mountain biking communities. This is not tourism growth and is simply transferring spending from one location to another.

The proposal itself references Tarland as a comparator. If Tarland attracts substantially greater visitor numbers

than Pitfichie is forecasting, then either the visitor numbers are a significant underestimate and traffic, social and environmental impacts will be much greater than claimed or the economic assumptions are unreliable. The application cannot rely on both arguments simultaneously. It is also unclear how large numbers of self-contained mountain biking visitors travelling in vans generate the level of local economic activity suggested within the proposal. **The proposal confirms that visitors to Tarland are mainly from Aberdeen - this confirms that the Pitfichie development will not achieve economic growth or new tourism, it is simply displacing economic activity.** The result is that other services and areas decline and others benefit. However, the net gain is negative as other areas fall into decline and require public funding to allow continued operation or fall into disrepair and become an economic and social problem. Other facilities such as the Lecht, should be promoted and visitors directed to these areas which have, along with associated businesses, historically relied on adventure tourism. Rather than slicing the small mountain biking pie into slices so small that no facility can support itself, we need a small number of genuinely great mountain biking centres. The Lecht, for example, is close to Aberdeen, has a large car park, on site facilities and uplift facilities in place. Developing Pitfichie will inevitably take visitors away from the Lecht and vice versa - thus hampering both facilities economic case. This is one example - there are other mountain biking facilities in Aberdeenshire and with a small number of mountain bikers, the problem is clear for the long-term survival of facilities due to over-population. **There is no provision in the plan for the development of other facilities in Aberdeenshire and impact this could have on the viability of the Pitfichie development. The proposal recognises downhill mountain biking is a small sport with relatively limited participation, so new facilities will not encourage growth of the sport, they will simply slice the pie into even smaller slices. Overall, it is highly probably that the tax payer funded development will never be self sufficient and given existing non-biking visitors will travel elsewhere, there will almost certainly be no net negative benefit.**

7. The Forest should be a mixed-use space

The proposal focuses almost exclusively on mountain biking interests. There is little meaningful consideration of walkers, runners, horse riders, families, casual cyclists and general forest users. The likely outcome is the gradual displacement of these users. A quiet, accessible forest will become dominated by uplift vehicles, downhill mountain biking, events, increased traffic and commercial operations. The claim that all users will benefit is unsupported. As parking charges will exist and the facility is for experienced downhill mountain bikers, it is an exceptionally exclusionary development with attempts made to deceive the reader into thinking other forest users will be able to continue to enjoy the forest. Therefore, this is another example where the net outcome will be negative for the overwhelming group of individuals who are not downhill mountain bikers .

8. Concerns Regarding Governance, Independence and Delivery Capability

There appear to be close links between mountain biking organisations, tourism bodies and parties supporting the application. This raises questions regarding whether the proposal has been assessed independently. There are further concerns regarding:

- GNE's experience in delivering projects of this scale.
- Lack of demonstrated commercial operating experience.
- Lack of environmental expertise.
- Lack of ecological expertise.
- Lack of hydrological expertise.
- Lack of evidence demonstrating capacity to manage a complex public facility.

The documentation contains aspirations and ambitions, but much less evidence of actual capability and an evidence based argument.

In summary, the proposal is founded on uncertain visitor forecasts, an unproven commercial model, inadequate environmental assessment, negligible community support and a road network that is fundamentally unsuited to the development proposed. Most importantly, there is no credible decommissioning strategy, no protection for public money should the venture fail and no clear evidence that taxpayers will not ultimately bear the burden of restoring the site.

For these reasons, I strongly object to the proposed asset transfer and request that the application be refused.

Kind Regards

[Redacted Signature]

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From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Objection to downhill centre at Pitfichie"
Date: 07 September 2026 10:48:09

I object because the amount of traffic going through Monymusk and its surrounding area would be dangerous to the public. Our local villages and infrastructure are not made to have large amounts of traffic. There are many families who live in & around Monymusk with young children using the school, the playground, the village hall all year round, as well as an important population of retired people.

The traditional character and the peaceful nature of the village and of the hill which have been preserved, looked after & enjoyed for generations would be permanently changed. This project would change the whole aspect of the village and its surrounding countryside for the benefit of a few and for the detriment of many.

[REDACTED]

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From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities; secretarycmmcc@gmail.com](mailto:secretarycmmcc@gmail.com)
Subject: Objection - Pitfichie Hill
Date: 07 September 2026 12:24:10

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to object to the proposed transfer of land at Pitfichie Hill to Gravitare North East.

I am not a local resident but a regular visitor to the area. I visit Pitfichie and the surrounding forests several times a year to walk with friends and familyride. I value Pitfichie as it currently is: open, free to access and shared by a wide range of people. My objection rests on the following concerns.

1. Loss of an open, mixed-use forest

Pitfichie is presently used by walkers, runners, horse riders, families and casual cyclists alongside mountain bikers, at no cost and without restriction. The proposal is built almost entirely around downhill mountain biking, uplift vehicles, events and paid parking. In practice this turns a shared public space into a specialist, charged facility aimed at experienced riders. Other visitors are likely to be pushed out over time by the traffic, vehicle movements and commercial activity, and the introduction of parking charges makes the site less accessible to the general public who currently use it freely. I do not accept the claim that all users benefit equally.

2. Road safety on unsuitable approach roads

The roads serving Pitfichie are narrow, single-track in places and poorly suited to a large rise in vehicle numbers, particularly the large vans typically used by mountain bikers, and to sizeable events. As someone who drives these roads when visiting, I have real concerns about concentrating significantly more traffic onto them, including at junctions and on stretches used by local families like my own. The application does not appear to demonstrate that everyday traffic impacts, as opposed to occasional race events, have been properly assessed. The proposed passing places also look unresolved in terms of land ownership, feasibility and agreement. Increasing traffic on this network raises the risk of a serious accident.

3. Inadequate environmental assessment

Much of what makes Pitfichie worth visiting is its natural setting. The environmental information supporting the application looks thin for a development of this scale. There is no meaningful biodiversity baseline, the survey work appears limited and reliant on winter conditions, and the application states that water features and seepage areas are still to be mapped and avoided - which shows those constraints have not yet been identified. There is little detail on surface water runoff, trail erosion, contamination from vehicle oils and fuels, or on toilet servicing and waste management. The proposal sets out aspirations to enhance biodiversity but provides limited evidence to support them, and it effectively asks for approval before the environmental constraints are understood. That is the wrong way round. I work professionally in environmental and waste management, and in my experience a development of this type should not be approved before baseline ecological surveys and a proper assessment of water, contamination and waste impacts have been completed. Too often matters like this are left as an after thought.

4. Public funding and long-term viability

As a member of the public, I am also concerned that the proposal seeks a substantial amount of public money while relying on optimistic and uncertain visitor and income assumptions, with no clear exit or restoration strategy if it does not succeed. It is not clear who would be responsible for removing infrastructure and restoring the site, or how the public interest is protected should the project fail.

For these reasons I object to the proposed asset transfer and ask that it be refused.

Kind Regards,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie - Community Asset Transfer Manager
Date: 07 September 2026 14:15:43

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed construction of the car park and two new mountain bike trails.

Having reviewed the information available, I believe this development would represent a significant positive addition to the North East, delivering benefits for local communities, tourism, public health, and the wider rural economy.

Mountain biking and spending time outdoors provide an important escape from the pressures of modern life. Aberdeenshire already has a thriving and enthusiastic cycling community, and in recent years I have observed a noticeable increase in participation among children and teenagers. The proposed trails would provide a valuable opportunity to encourage more young people to engage in healthy outdoor activity, develop a lifelong appreciation for nature, and make use of the outstanding countryside that we are fortunate to have access to.

As a resident [REDACTED] of Monymusk, one of the key factors in choosing to live here was the excellent access to outdoor recreation, including walking, cycling, and the wider natural environment. Investments that improve responsible access to these spaces help strengthen the appeal of rural communities and contribute positively to residents' quality of life.

The provision of a purpose-built car park would also help manage visitor numbers more effectively and reduce pressure on the village itself. By providing dedicated parking facilities close to the trail network, visitor vehicles would be less likely to utilise residential streets or informal parking areas, thereby improving safety and reducing congestion for local residents.

I also believe the proposal presents an opportunity to diversify the use of the site in a way that can deliver environmental benefits. Compared with the continuation of intensive monoculture plantation forestry, carefully designed recreational trails can encourage greater engagement with the natural environment while creating opportunities for habitat enhancement and biodiversity improvements. Many commercial plantations support relatively limited ground-level biodiversity beneath a dense canopy, whereas recreational access projects often bring a greater focus on habitat management, native species restoration, and long-term environmental stewardship.

Beyond the immediate recreational benefits, the development has the potential to generate economic value for the wider area. Purpose-built mountain bike facilities are proven attractions that bring visitors who support local businesses, including cafes, accommodation providers and shops. The increase in visitor spending would contribute positively to the local economy and help support employment in rural communities.

Finally, I believe projects such as this play an important role in fostering a connection between people and the natural environment. They encourage responsible outdoor recreation, promote physical and mental wellbeing, and help inspire the next generation to value and care for the landscapes around them.

For these reasons, I fully support the proposal.

Kind Regards [REDACTED], Monymusk resident.

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Objection to Pitfichie Hill - Downhill Mountain Biking
Date: 07 September 2026 14:20:35

Hello

I object because:

1. Increased traffic through Monymusk. Why is this development not being situated near the existing Pitfichie Forest Carpark? Would avoid the need for increased traffic through a small village while also making use of existing carparking facilities. Seems a no-brainer.
2. The development plans to use a single track dead end road. Even with the addition of a few passing places this is not going to go well with verges destroyed etc. The council is unable to maintain roads locally as it is so without a commitment to increased funding how is this going to end well.
3. Note in the development that the intention is to use diesel powered 4 x 4s to transport bikers to the top of the hills. In 2026 is this form of transport really the best option given the pollution, noise etc. Surely the vehicles should be electric powered in keeping with the focus on sustainability
4. Tarland trails are relatively close by. Why do we need another development? Those in favour often focus on the increased facilities however they don't focus on what will be lost - tranquility. A key reason why people move to a quiet village like Monymusk and spend time in the countryside. Diesel vehicles running back and forth up the hill all day isn't really in keeping with that.

Best regards

Live locally [REDACTED], Monymusk

Sent from [Outlook for Android](#)

Sent from [Outlook for Android](#)

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From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Proposed downhill bike rides
Date: 07 September 2026 17:09:28

I am very much against this as it will cause great disruption to the people of the village of Monymusk and destroy our peace and being able to walk on the hillside around our area. It is to the detriment of the majority of the local people who live here
Sent from my iPhone

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Proposed Pitfichie Community Asset Transfer
Date: 07 September 2026 21:43:19

Good Evening,

[REDACTED]

I would be concerned about speaking publicly in support of this project due to the reaction from those locally that are against but I wanted to email to say how much of a positive impact it would have to Monymusk and the surrounding area.

[REDACTED] the impact of the obesity and mental health crisis. [REDACTED] using exercise to treat a range of conditions and the barriers to encouraging people to exercise are huge. Any projects that encourage activity in the outdoors can only be a good thing.

The village school has a declining population due to young families moving away from the area. There are a number of families in the village that moved to the area in part due to the existing mountain bike trails. I think this would support development of the community and support the local school.

The events that have taken place on the hill this year have had no impact on level of traffic in the village. You would not have known they were happening if it was not for advertising on local social media.

Other towns in the area and other parts of Scotland have benefited from investment into bike tracks.

I understand there is a level of concern from the minority of the village who are very vocal. I would appreciate that my comments remain anonymous but I do hope this development takes place.

Kind Regards

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie development
Date: 09 September 2026 15:36:22

Good Afternoon,

I am writing to show my support for the plans to develop Pitfichie. A purpose built carpark is sorley needed. We have horses and used to take the trailer over to ride round the forest at Pitfichie but the carparks at present are un kept and there isn't enough room anymore. Also [REDACTED] the rural bus which picks her up and drops her in a layby very close to Pitfichie and on several occasions the bus has struggled to stop, making it unsafe as the layby are also used by people who walk and bike at Pitfichie. It would be great to have the trails managed and looked after by a local group and obviously the carpark would be fantastic.

Kind Regards [REDACTED].

Sent from [Outlook for Android](#)

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

54

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie Car Park and Bike Trails
Date: 09 September 2026 15:39:40

Dear FLS,

I would like to express my support for the CATS application at Pitfichie Hill. I think it is important to formalise the current high level of usage by bikers, and will be an amenity that the local community can be proud of.

Regards

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie downhill track proposal
Date: 09 September 2026 15:45:29

Good afternoon, I was just emailing to voice my support for the proposed cycling track at Pitfichie by Gravitare.

I think this would be an excellent opportunity for Monymusk, it would give younger people an outdoors activity locally that they can go to and enjoy, it would give seasoned riders a brilliant location to explore. The village itself would benefit from more through flow of people which could boost the local economy and would give an opportunity to people to establish new businesses.

I feel it would lower antisocial behaviors in the area by giving something to do that is easily accessible and doesn't require traveling long distance as Monymusk is rather secluded from surrounding areas.

I feel that despite being a small village Monymusk would easily handle an increase in traffic and footfall and stands to benefit from it.

All in all, I believe this is to be an excellent opportunity to develop the local area.

Thank you

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Support for CATS application at Pitfichie Hill
Date: 09 September 2026 16:33:22

Dear FLS,

I would like to express my support for the CATS application at Pitfichie Hill. It's a unique opportunity for the development of mountain biking in Aberdeen and shire.

Regards

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Planning application at Pitfichie Hill
Date: 09 September 2026 16:39:45

Dear FLS

Thank you for doing so much work to help develop MTB at Pitfichie.

The latest proposed project; CATS application; will only add to this amenity.

Having such a facility will be a great addition to Monymusk and the whole of Aberdeenshire.

I live at [REDACTED] and ride at Pitfichie on a regular basis.

Regards [REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Mountain biking track
Date: 09 September 2026 16:51:29

Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to object to the Gravitare North East downhill mountain biking at Pitfichie.

I believe this proposal is too large for this nature rich location. The development would introduce additional traffic through Monymusk and along the final single-track access road, parking will also be increased so there are safety concerns for residents, pedestrians and school children. As grandparents collecting children from school the traffic is already too dangerous coming out of the village.

The proposal would also change Pitfichie from a quiet area into a downhill racing venue with regular organised events.

Have other locations and access arrangements been properly considered? . Local concerns regarding traffic, access, parking and environmental impacts remain largely unresolved.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the application be refused.

Yours faithfully,

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Gravitate planning application support
Date: 09 September 2026 17:03:28

Dear FLS team

am writing to express my support for Gravitate’s Pitfichie project.

I live in Monymusk and [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] in the development of high-quality mountain biking facilities in the area. From both a personal and business perspective, I see a clear need for and benefit from the project.

I believe the development would provide valuable opportunities for local riders, encourage participation in the sport, and bring wider benefits to the local area and economy.

I fully support the project and hope it can continue to progress.

Thanks and regards

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie Hill community transfer
Date: 09 September 2026 17:54:40

I would like to place on record some thoughts [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] regarding the experience of the panel with which the decision of the community asset transfer rests. I would like to add that it is important to make decisions from positions of knowledge, a lot of the objections seem to be around the impact on traffic through the village. Monymusk has a thriving arts scene and many artists take part in North East Open Studios, are the objectors saying that its acceptable to visit and or travel through the village to appreciate art but unacceptable to go mountainbiking? Are only certain visitors welcome in Monymusk?

Recently there was an unfortunate incident near the village where historical artefacts were vandalised and through various conversations it was suggested that the youths responsible lacked activity to channel energy in to, could I suggest that an improved facility at Pitfichie with input from qualified mountainbike coaches would be a suitable activity?

It was depressing to hear such negativity from a vocal minority [REDACTED] some of whom claim to be regular users of the hill. I have lived in Monymusk [REDACTED] and regularly visited [REDACTED] before to go mountainbiking and in my experience of using both car parks even with a few cars visible I rarely see anyone else on the hill. The proposed increase in visitors is unlikely to have any noticeable impact to traffic flow or the peaceful tranquility so valued by all users. It is incredibly frustrating to see long-term, positive changes for the younger generation face such vitriolic opposition, especially when those changes seem, to me at least, to be clearly beneficial. Whether we like it or not change happens everyday, we can embrace it and shape it or reject it and end up irrelevant.

Yours faithfully,

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie hill bike trails
Date: 09 September 2026 20:08:31

Hello FLS,

I hope this message finds you well.

I wanted to take a moment to express my support for the CAT transfer lease of land at Pitfichie to build bike trails and related infrastructure.

As [REDACTED] outdoor enthusiast, I have been impressed by the dedication of the GNE to supporting recreation on the hill, enhancing and formalising visitor experience and particularly their desire to produce wildlife corridors across the hillside.

I'm a massive advocate of UKFS and feel working with GNE helps FLS deliver all the best practice requirements of sustainable forest management over a large part of the Pitfichie LMP area.

I'd be happy to discuss my thoughts further, but take this as a massive thumbs up from a Monymusk resident.

Many thanks

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Gravitate north east CATS
Date: 09 September 2026 21:19:29

I would like to express my support for the CATS application by Gravitate North East in regards to Pitfichie hill. The current plans will help formalise what's already in the area and will provide an asset for not only the local area but for mountain biking in Scotland. I live locally in Monymusk and believe that this plan can re establish Pitfichie hill as a mountain biking destination in Scotland.

Thanks

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Date: 09 September 2026 21:23:00

Dear Sirs,

I am emailing to express my support for the CATS application submitted by Gravitate North East for the development at Pitfichie Hill.

I think that given the existing use of the area by mountain bikers the plans will help to direct people to appropriate and managed facilities.

The project will help to support Aberdeenshire’s claims to offer world class cycling facilities for all users.

Regards
[REDACTED]
Monymusk Resident

Sent from my iPhone

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Support for Gravitite Application (Pitfichie)
Date: 09 September 2026 21:41:24

Dear FLS,

I would like to express my strong support for the CATS application at Pitfichie Hill.

It is important that mountain biking continues to be developed and promoted within Aberdeenshire, providing high quality trails and facilities for riders of all ages and abilities.

Pitfichie is an outstanding venue with significant potential, and this proposal would further enhance its value as a recreational asset for the local community.

The development would not only provide a much-needed amenity for local residents but also help increase participation in mountain biking, encourage healthier lifestyles, and attract visitors to the area.

This would bring wider benefits through increased tourism and support for local businesses.

I believe this proposal represents a positive investment in outdoor recreation and community wellbeing, and I fully support its approval.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Date: 09 September 2026 21:53:55

Dear FLS,

I would like to express my support for the CATS application at Pitfichie Hill. I think it is important to formalise the current high level of usage by bikers, and will be an amenity that the local community can be proud of.

Regards

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: APP/2026/1295 Pitfichie Mountain Biking Development
Date: 09 September 2026 22:08:13

Dear Sir/Madam,

I would like to note my approval and support for the biking development at Pitfichie. I am local to the village and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] do a lot of mountain biking in the local area. It would be an opportunity lost not to progress the development and provide opportunity to the community and wider population access into the outdoors through biking.

Thanks

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

67

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie - Gravitare CATS
Date: 10 September 2026 09:14:10

Dear FLS,

I would like to express my support for the CATS application at Pitfichie. It is important to recognise the current high level of usage by bikers and I strongly believe that it will become a resource that the local community can be very proud of.

Best Regards,

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

Objection to Gravitare North East (GNE) request to Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) for a Community Asset Transfer of land on the NE of Pitfichie Hill for the proposed downhill bike trails, carpark, toilet and associated infrastructure

As a local member of the public who enjoys walking and observing the wildlife on Pitfichie Hill, and the adjacent Cairn William and Bennachie hills, I object to this Asset Transfer request on the following grounds:

1. Primarily, disturbance to the wildlife known to be present on the hill. Attention should be on nesting Goshawk (five pairs known in the immediate area) which are particularly sensitive to disturbance and liable to abandon nest sites. This will likely occur if a major biking event is held in the nesting season March to August, which would seem very likely. Other raptors are known to be present in the immediate area (Kestrel, Sparrowhawk, Osprey - a Schedule 1 species and could possibly nest on the site as they do with three nest sites close by on Bennachie). Honey Buzzard has also moved into the area, a rare breeding species in UK, with at least one known nest site close by on the other side of the river.

The increase from one to three downhill trails will attract more users, moving at speed and cause significant disturbance. The trails in themselves will serve to fragment the immediate habitat, particularly after the FLS replanting scheme has been implemented. The use of motorised uplift vehicles, four times an hour, eight hours a day, four days a week, will also cause disturbance, particularly on the narrow uphill track/path between Pitfichie and Cairn William hills. GNE's Site Operation Plan does not state whether this path is suitable for motorised vehicles. Google Maps indicate that it is narrower than the main forestry road round the base of the hill. Walking it myself it is overgrown in parts and will require cutting back of gorse. The bottom and top sections are motorable but the middle section is narrow (see attached photos) and currently suitable only for an ATV. The entire track is eroded with water run-off gullies which will likely erode further with regular vehicle traffic. The entire track may require regular regrading. It is not known whether GNE have planned or costed for this (I could not see it in their plans).



2. GNE's Biodiversity Plan was described as fairly general and lacking detail in the Natural Environment Team Consultation document. Particular mention is made of potential disturbance during the bird nesting season April to August with the potential for further informal path creation, the lack of consultation with RSPB or the local Raptor Study Group for data and advice, and the need for a focussed raptor survey. The latter should be undertaken by professional surveyor(s), particularly in the breeding season. GNE's Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) was primarily a desk study and only a one day site survey in January. The birds data available from the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) are limited (I know myself because I requested it too) and there is no evidence of any other data consultation having been undertaken. The local Raptor Study Group and the local North East Scotland Bird Recorder could also have been consulted. A one day site survey in January would not provide any meaningful information on breeding birds nor the presence of migratory species (e.g.Osprey, Honey Buzzard).
Further suggestions are for more detail regarding a compensatory replanting in return for the carpark with advise from Scottish Forestry, and details of a biodiversity action plan with detailed works, timeframe, responsible persons and accountability, and future monitoring. Regarding the latter point, the Plan indicates that most of the work will be undertaken by volunteers, many of which will likely not be downhill bikers, without specifying who or which organisations these may be, who will be responsible within GNE for pursuing this, or what happens if there is a only a limited or no response. Who puts out the stated bird and bat boxes?
Furthermore, there is no detail as to how any reporting or recording of wildlife observations or future monitoring may be captured and forwarded to NESBReC. Who takes responsibility for this or are they depending on individual reporting with no evidence as to whether it has taken place? It can hardly be expected that downhill bikers, concentrating on the trail and riding at speed, will be particularly observant of nearby wildlife (if it sticks around to be seen under the circumstances), nor may have the necessary knowledge to know what they see. Neither would I expect many to take the time to record or report their observations.
3. Both GNE's Construction Method Statement and Planning Statement state that building the infrastructure (trails and carpark) will not impact the natural hillside water courses, and by implication damage private water supplies to nearby properties, of which there are several and all of whom obtain their water from off the hill. Nevertheless GNE propose to bring an excavator on to site to construct the trails. There is no evidence in GNE's plans that they have knowledge or have researched the hydrology of the hillside or know from whence the nearby private residences obtain their water supply. GNE must make some effort to assure its neighbours that their intended activities will not adversely impact or interfere with their water supply. If lost, reinstatement would be a difficult and expensive exercise.
4. GNE have claimed a wide range of lasting public benefits for local communities as their proposed project is developed. These include local spend in local businesses and services, as well as the benefits to physical activity and healthy lifestyles, community participation, and sustainable tourism. Most of these are 'soft' aspirations and difficult to demonstrate. The benefits to local businesses, however, could be demonstrated with some market research and demonstrable business growth. About half the size of the two trail biking centres in Tarland (20,000 visitors pa cf. Tarland's 40,000) a direct comparison could be made to determine as to the commercial and economic benefits the latter development has brought.
The immediate benefit to Monymusk village is likely to be limited with only one cafe/

restaurant available at weekends, and no shop, no pub. Shopping opportunities are further afield and many participants may choose to bring their own provisions. (My local experience was dining in the local Grant Arms one week after a major horse-riding endurance event held around local roads and trails and hosted by Monymusk Estate. When asked if the event brought much business to the cafe/restaurant was told “none”. Will trail bikers spend more than affluent horse riders?)

Finally, the point GNE has made of the minimum traffic impact on the village was made on their very recent survey of through-traffic which they argued was well below ‘free flow’ thresholds. A more meaningful survey would be over a weekend when GNE or any other trail biking organisation had organised a local major event (e.g. a national Enduro event) on the one current downhill trail.

On the basis of these major issues and problem areas, this proposed development should be refused.

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: PROPOSED DOWNHILL MOUNTAIN BIKING CENTRE AT PITFICHIE
Date: 10 September 2026 15:47:31

Sirs

I and my family have been aware of a proposal to construct a downhill mountain biking facility on your land at Pitfichie, Monymusk.

As residents of Monymusk village [REDACTED] we find such a proposal would be totally against the peace and tranquility which this part of Aberdeenshire presently enjoys, and which we, and many others in this area located to for that reason.

Already we have lost the priviledge of hiking and dog walking in our area with the opening of the Pitfichie Bike Trails some years ago along Cairn William and the proposed downhill centre would basically curtail any other such recreation in this lovely part of the country.

This proposal would add no value to our local community or businesses but would severely curtail our enjoyment of the scenery and safety afforded by the existing hill area.

In addition, the road system here is inadequate to accommodate the numbers of vehicles anticipated and is already used by large agricultural vehicles.

We have already expressed our objection to these plans to Aberdeenshire Council for the reasons mentioned above and sincerely hope you will be sympathetic to the wishes of what we know to be, the majority of local residents.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Objection to downhill cycling track on Pitfichie Hill
Date: 10 September 2026 16:48:30

I am writing to state my objection to this proposed cycle track.

[REDACTED]

My reasons for objecting :-

1. I would no longer feel safe to walk over Pitfichie Hill
2. The surrounding infrastructure is not able to cope with the proposed increase in traffic, access road is single track with passing places
3. The quiet village of Monymusk will be ruined with the continual flow of traffic
4. The proposed uplift vehicles running for extended periods through Pitfichie hill will be an unbearable disturbance in a quiet area
5. There would be significant noise generated throughout the day with cyclists shouting to each other.

I urge FLS not to rent the required land which would be required for this development to proceed.

Your Sincerely

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie Downhill Bike Trails - Objection to GNE Expansion Proposals
Date: 10 September 2026 17:06:09

Pitfichie Hill Downhill Mountain Bike Trails Development

From: [REDACTED]

AGAINST PROPOSAL

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to express my concerns about the proposed development of downhill mountain bike trails at Pitfichie Hill by Gravitare North East, and to formally place my objection for the following reasons.

First and foremost is the proposed regular, scheduled use of motorised non-forestry vehicles on the hills. This completely negates the value of the natural environment to those who live near to it and to those who use the hills for relaxation, recuperation and fresh air, for walking and exercise (including that of animals), for cross-country cycling and for observation and enjoyment of the wildlife and scenery.

Most of those living adjacent to the hills, and therefore neighbours of the Forestry, have moved to the area specifically for the benefits of the peace and tranquillity, the unpolluted air and the rural environment. All of this would be significantly and adversely affected by diesel vehicles on the hills. They would generate unacceptable noise and exhaust fumes, together with the physical damage caused by the infrastructure required by such vehicles and the subsequent heavy use.

The weight of the projected increase in traffic through the village of Monymusk, and surrounding narrow and single track roads. Gravitare North East (GNE) state in their proposal that they estimate 20,000 visitors per year, the majority of whom will arrive via the village, by car, van or camper van.

The road through Monymusk village is entirely residential, with many families with young children living directly along its route. There is also a Primary School, the entrance of which is situated between two bends in the road, and a Playgroup, situated in the village hall. Many children cross this road to access the playgroup, the play park and the school. These children and their carers will therefore be at an undoubtedly increased risk of road traffic accidents and consequent serious injury.

I object to the development of the site near Pitfichie Castle into a carpark with toilet facilities. GNE state that "This project will be an asset for the community, with proper car parking and toilets". These are not facilities either requested or needed by the village, and are being developed purely for the benefit of the visiting bike community. The two businesses within the village are unlikely to benefit financially. The Thrift Shop does not open at weekends, and The Grant Arms does not currently see use by those visiting the existing bike trails.

The carpark is to comprise 76 parking spaces. The majority of cyclists arrive by van, and it is anticipated that others will arrive by campervan. Each campervan, depending on size, will utilise at least two car parking spaces. Charging for parking will encourage those not wishing to pay, to seek to park for free in passing places, or in the village, and will inevitably cause congestion and poor visibility, and thus increase the risk of accidents.

The fact that the carpark will be "most likely locked when not in use" further proves that it is not intended as an asset for the community.

The crossroads junction at the proposed site is a difficult junction, particularly when trying to cross from NE to SW, and I believe there is a high risk of accidents at the junction. I object to the removal of mature broadleaf trees. Since Storm Arwen, strides have been made across Aberdeenshire to reintroduce native and ancient trees and woodland, and the removal of healthy trees is unacceptable.

I took part in the community survey, and was one of the highly significant majority (217/242 ~ 90%) who objected to GNE's plans: but at no point was asked to participate in a survey run by GNE, or even had knowledge of such.

GNE have previously stated that their proposal will bring a sense of pride to the village.
That already exists, in abundance, as should be known by GNE if they had truly got involved with the community.

The proposed development, for the sole benefit of visiting day-visit, thrill-seekers, can only diminish that pride; also harming the wellbeing of the local community and neighbours to the Forestry land.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Fwd: Pitfichie Hill Bike Trails and Carpark - Gravitate North East Asset Transfer Request
Date: 10 September 2026 20:02:44

----- Original Message -----

From: [REDACTED]
To: communities@forestryandland.gov.uk
Sent: Thursday, September 10th 2026, 19:53
Subject: Pitfichie Hill Bike Trails and Carpark - Gravitate North East Asset Transfer Request

FAO Community Asset Transfer Manager

I refer to the above and wish to register my objection to this transfer request, based on the following criteria.

Negative Impact on Local Traffic Management.

I live [REDACTED] on the outskirts of Monymusk.

This area consists of a number of residential dwellings and mixed arable/livestock farming.

Access is gained via a single track road with minimal passing places and numerous road side ditches.

Aside from local resident's motor cars and farming vehicles, together with frequent livestock movements on foot, the road is used by walkers, dog walkers, runners and cyclists. It carries low volume traffic (for which it was designed) and is considered mostly safe to use.

In recent years I have noticed an increase in leisure 'events' on the road including motor cycles, classic cars, horses and cycles. The biggest increase however has been the use of vehicles connected to the use of mountain bikes on Pitfichie Hill and Bogmore Wood. These include motorcars with mountain bike racks, motorcars towing trailers containing mountain bikes and motor homes with attached mountain bikes. Some of these vehicles appear to be semi commercial.

It has become apparent that the Todlachie/Pitmunie single track road is facing increased road traffic for which it was never intended or designed, to facilitate mountain biking activities on Pitmunie Hill. This involves accessing the Pitmunie downhill site from the Tillyfourie area or Pitfichie Forestry carpark and returning later in the day.

In addition, mountain bikes are already descending downhill and 'off piste' from Pitfichie Hill into the Pitmunie and Todlachie settlements, whereupon they are being uplifted by vehicles as described above.

Consequently, I have materialising fears that road traffic from the downhill site is being displaced into the Pitmunie/Todlachie area and placing excess and unsafe demand on its only access road. The impact of the proposal will only increase these difficulties.

Pedestrian and Dog Walking Access to Pitfichie Hill from the Todlachie/Pitmunie Settlement areas

I walk through the Bogmore area above Pitmunie on the metalled forest road and intend to do so in future with a dog(s).

I have grave concerns about encountering the uplift vehicles from the downhill site while using the above route and also highspeed mountain bikes descending 'off piste' from Pitfichie Hill. While the mountain bikes using the facility will no doubt initially confine themselves to the centre, in due course the desire to explore will become overwhelming, this of course facilitated by private vehicle providing uplift facilities on the single track access road in the Pitmunie settlement (as already occurs).

Please accept the above observations as my formal objection to the application.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Objection to Downhill Centre at Pitfichie
Date: 10 September 2026 22:18:47

To whom it may concern,

I object to FLS approving a community take over of an area of Pitfichie Hill, Monymusk because I feel this is a totally unnecessary development that will have no benefit to the immediate community of Pitfichie and Monymusk.

There are already cycle tracks on Pitfichie and Cairn William with a designated Car Park at Whitehills (on the other side of the hill) so the construction of a new carpark will disturb the flora and fauna, emitting unnecessary carbon into the environment. The access to the proposed new car park is situated on blind corner and [REDACTED] on many occasions vehicles and cyclist emerging from the forest without stopping or looking for traffic on the public road. This is a narrow single track non classified no-through road with multiple blind corners and very little passing places. The increase in traffic will cause a great inconvenience to the residents who have to use this road on a daily basis.

The construction works and huge increase of visitors to the area will have an impact on the environment and the wildlife including some very rare raptors that nest in the area.

[REDACTED] and feel that this development will destroy this quiet tranquil unspoiled area with noise pollution, littering and possible anti-social behaviour.

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
 To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
 Subject: Application for mountain bike centre on Pitfichie Hill, Aberdeenshire
 Date: 11 September 2026 19:03:51

Letter to Forestry Commission: Mountain biking proposal on Pitfichie Hill

Dear Sir/Madam

We are writing to express our concerns about the proposal to allow some of your land on Pitfichie Hill near Monymusk to be used for the construction of a mountain biking centre. [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED] this proposed centre and our concerns relate to potential damage to private water supplies and disturbance to the wildlife, especially in the breeding season.

Regarding domestic water supplies, a particular concern in this area is where they are privately owned. We understand that there is no up-to-date map of these supplies and that existing maps have many errors. In connection with this we were surprised to learn that the southerly side of Cairn William and Pitfichie Hill is a protected water catchment area (PWCA), which already has a biking trail down the middle. It is essential that FLS presents an up-to-date map showing private water supplies and PWCAs to augment existing land use data in areas proposed for development. In addition, it must be shown that disturbance of the current land surface cannot affect the potability of private water supplies. Potential problems apply to shallow reservoirs tapped by springs or shallow boreholes. These can be disrupted by heavy machinery eg bulldozers or JCBs. Another problem concerns shallow acidic waters in peaty areas. These can be enriched in heavy metals and are not suitable for drinking. If such waters were disturbed they might contaminate domestic supplies. Has anyone considered that such an outcome could lead to claims for compensation from local householders?

The Don valley in this area is particularly well endowed with wildlife as befitting the diverse habitats present and includes rare species such as osprey, goshawk crossbill, pine marten and red squirrel. Over 30 species of bird contribute to the dawn chorus in our garden. There is no evidence in the public domain that a proper survey of, and impact statement on, the wildlife has been carried out by the company proposing to construct a mountain biking centre.

Because we think that neither of these concerns have been addressed properly, we believe that the proposal for a mountain biking centre on Pitfichie Hill should be turned down.

[REDACTED]

 This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
 To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
 Subject: Gravitate North East (GNE) - Pitfichie Hill, Monymusk.
 Date: 12 September 2026 14:39:26

Dear Forestry and Land

We email regarding the proposal for the 25-year lease for 1.24 hectares of land at Pitfichie Hill, Monymusk, where GNE propose to use the land for the creation of a car park, riders paddock area and two mountain bike trails.

[REDACTED] keen horse riders and are dismayed at the gradual loss of amenity of horse riding routes in Aberdeenshire, mainly to cyclists. We have to travel from home to ride, as the roads near us are unsafe for hacking. There are now many routes where there are simply too many cyclists (Most of The Deeside Way, where I used to ride minimum of once per week is now impractical to ride along due to numerous cyclists), and Kirkhill Forestry and The Tarland Trails where MTB has been prioritised ahead of other users, making riding unsafe (terrifying!) and/or inaccessible due to trail use and lack of parking. In addition, many areas of forestry eg Spyhill and Durrus are closed/impassable/left unrideable due to forestry work ongoing for very long periods of time/limited or no parking spaces for trailers. Any surveys of these areas will report that they are not used/rarely used by equestrian users, but this is of course due to hazardous conditions precluding riders, rather than a lack of interest or numbers available to utilise them.

In contrast, Nature Scot have done a great job, eg at St Cyrus beach, of meeting the needs of all users with proportionate disabled/mobile home/horsebox parking, separate paths for various users and employing a ranger aided by volunteers, who are friendly and polite, but whose limited overseeing presence really seems to be the key to respectful shared use.

Please could we ask that in this development, thought and consideration is given to all users by development of separate paths, parking provision for all and education for all users such as the excellent educational film 'A Shared Forest', made in collaboration with the British Horse Society (Scotland). <https://www.facebook.com/reel/500187152494417> so that this lovely forestry is not added to the list where horses are excluded by over prioritising the needs of another group. We strongly believe it is possible to co-exist safely and for all - cyclists, walkers, dog owners and horse riders - to enjoy the countryside equally

Thank you for your time

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of

Pitfichie Hill Monymusk
Objection to Gravitare North East (GNE) requested Community Asset Transfer (CAT)
Resident [REDACTED] Monymusk

Firstly this is a change of use for a large area of Pitfiche Hill that until now has been shared with the biking community by Walkers, Runners, Dog Walkers, Bird Watchers, and Horse Riders many of whom live in Monymusk. A recent survey around the village with over 240 responses showed that 90% of local villagers are against the application. There is no public or village benefit to agree to a 25 year lease.

General Area Traffic and Lane Conditions and Safety.

GNE estimate that 20,000 bikers will be attracted to area. Firstly how did they come by this figure? Currently an equal sized facility at Tarland attracts 40,000 bikers without uplift facilities. Using vehicle occupancy figures from another event centre at Glentress this equates to a minimum of 15,000 vehicles a year plus all those associated with events. Many of these will be large 4x4 vehicles, vans, camper vans and even larger motor homes.

I will concentrate my objections on the dangers this would pose on the single track lane and the Hill. There is also a potential given the vast numbers of additional vehicles driving through the village past the school and playground for accidents. This is also for considerable lengths single lane access as people park along it legally by their homes. Visiting biker drivers are likely to be distracted as they can see the hill, some of them for the first time that they will be riding on. Village residents also report of frequent speeding of vehicles with bikes on the roof.

The lane itself is currently in a dreadful state of repair, pot holes, collapsed edges, grass and weeds growing up through cracks, holes and flooding. From earlier in the year Highways promised repairs by 24th August 2026. This has not happened and currently there is no date for the works, apparently as road repairs go this lane has low priority?.

To date the road has cost the Councils insurers thousands of pounds in damage claims and [REDACTED] towed four vehicles, all non-residents in the lane back from the edge of the drop off into the river Don where they have skidded on black ice. If you don't know the lane you wouldn't expect it. It was not that not long ago that sadly a driver was drowned in the River Dee with a very similar incident. This lane can be treacherous from October onwards through to even May this year and is no longer salted by the Councils road teams.

The road also floods in heavy rain adjacent to the proposed car park turning into a river (video available if required) and the groundworks for this site will make things worse. Talking to a highways team that were out here there is nothing GNE will be able to do to prevent things getting worse. Again talking to GNE at an open meeting they say they have engineering plans to stop this problem. Where are these plans?

I note from the planning application that there are proposed new passing places planned? I have spoken to roads development and they have confirmed (email) that the total width requirement would be a minimum of 6 meters given the type of traffic that uses the lane. Even this may be inadequate given the size of some of the farming and forestry vehicles. The current road (tarmac width) is 3 meters. Between the property boundaries walls and fences there is not a further 3 meters to construct a passing place, especially along the boundary parallel to the river a near shear bank with at least a 10 meter drop.

GNE propose to charge for car parking it's another crucial part of their business model income stream. It is a known that people are prepared to park in the most idiotic of places to avoid parking fees. We already have problems with cars and vans parked on the lane edges because the forestry path is too rutted and rough to drive up, blocking the lane for farm vehicles and parking in passing places. This will be increased and a real dangerous problem on this lane if this plan was to go ahead. It will also affect losses for GNE.

The business plan and especially the financial elements don't appear to be sound. They haven't even got the funding yet all based on assumptions. Let us remember GNE apparently recently spent around £90,00 of public money on feasibility studies for a previous site that they were blocked from using. Perhaps the powers that be may not want to give them anymore?

I'm not an expert but I understand analysis by a professional points to major issues especially with statements regarding profitability or lack of it. There are many assumptions from GNE but I can't find any concrete data to back them up. Even down to Vehicle costs there are no details of the vehicle. With 4x4 packages costing up to £80,000 and even above to cope with the terrain and public safety. plus fuel consumption varying widely and that is before service and general maintenance costs.

A missing environmental threat is what are they proposing to do about refuelling? Onsite or drive either to Alford or Inverurie probably on a daily basis given fuel consumption with this type of operation. Are their plans for Diesel fuel storage at the car park? Greatly increasing the risk of pollution and crime. Nothing appears to be in GNE budgeting for anything to do with this.

There also doesn't appear to be any contingency budget planning for breakdowns. [REDACTED] this is far from uncommon, repairs often taking a week or more and even vehicle recovery can be an issue. Where are potential hire costs or projected lost revenue in their budgeting?

Environment.

Currently this is an area of great beauty enjoyed by Bikers, Walking Groups, Dog Walkers, Runners, bird watchers and Horse Riders. This proposal will fundamentally change the area.

With car parking, toilet blocks, riders paddock and 4x4 uplift operations scaring the landscape and a danger to people wanting to use the forestry paths for anything other than riding in an uplift 4x4, this is just for the benefit of one group. As for the GNE bio diversity plan, it is simply proposals! The land that GNE propose to rent doesn't seem to tie in with their planning application and the actual trails also don't seem to match what is there?

I have contacted two major civil construction companies and aside the car park does not seem to be big enough (no calculations from GNE) given the predicted numbers and as Glentress pointed out the overlap because bikers will want to get their monies worth out of the uplift charge and won't get so tired meaning the morning and afternoon peaks converge and greater parking capacity will be required. Also the type of vehicles and additional space required to remove bikes from racks doesn't seem to have been factored in. It was also pointed out that the run off from the car park especially in heavy rain will probably contain contaminates from the vehicles. This will be washed in part through an arable crop field and down into the river

The 4x4 uplift vehicles will tear into the tracks especially in winter creating new run offs with sediment and in a protected by law private water supply area. Worth noting that currently neither GNE or Forestry Land Scotland (FLS) have accurate records for supply locations. There is also no detail behind how GNE plan to prevent other people using their own 4x4 vehicles and trailers on the tracks created, especially on days when GNE will not be operating. Experience from living in the national park of Dartmoor was that barriers with chains and padlocks were totally useless. A little hand held battery disc cutter would be used and the barrier opened. What do GNE propose?

Prediction is a greater number of people will switch from GNE operational days and sort their own uplifts. Again there is no mention of any analysis or research from GNE.

Non water use toilets are part of the plan. They do not unexpectedly vary in quality and performance. I contacted the National Trust who like these toilets as an option when developing their own sites. It did come with a warning though about suitable contractors and sites. They pointed me in the direction of one of their preferred installers. The construction process involves a lot of excavation and concrete, and given the drinking water issues additional damp and water proofing a belt and braces for leaks would be essential. What quotations have GNE obtained and where can the details be viewed.

There was also a warning that spillage can occur during emptying, something out of their control. I spoke to two tanker operators here and neither given the off road location would give assurances against spillage. There are large cost implications here even for a very minor clean up. Again I can't find any budget for this type of risk management.

It is also not possible to have toilets at the top and bottom of the runs an area where people congregate and especially at events, this is due to access for emptying tankers. Witnessed at the last event were people constantly going into the bushes and trees and urinating,

overnight campers have been known defecate in the trees. This is a protected drinking water catchment area, and on that subject the developer does not seem to have submitted a specialist assessment report on the potential effects to drinking water.

Hand washing is also an issue, gels could be provided but experiences point to them getting stolen or miss used, a health issue! It is also vital with this type of toilet to have them inspected and cleaned at least twice a day but preferably three or four times if an event was on. Winter inspections can also be important especially in areas like this prone to heavy frost. How are GNE going to achieve this especially on the days when they are not operating? Their budget which is again hard to analyse doesn't seem to reflect the operational costs here.

There has been a significant increase in camper vans and motor homes overnighting on the hill. This is a problem to be aware of flagged up to me by Glentress. To demonstrate the irresponsibility of some of these people, and it only takes one. A few weeks back when forest fires ragged [REDACTED] in a popular overnight campervan spot two disposable bbq's just thrown on a grass bank along with rubbish ([REDACTED]). One ember could have started a serious forest fire.

This problem has been pointed out to GNE as it will increase and they do not seem to have any concrete plans to prevent overnight camping in their car park or stop vans being able to access further up the hill in the evening thanks to their 4x4 tracks. As already mentioned a simple barrier gate with a padlock and chain is worthless. There is often considerable noise during the night from music systems and bbq partying bikers alongside their camper vans.

GNE have failed to provide accurate route maps for their 4x4 uplift operations. They seem to be adverse to using OS Maps instead preferring un readable google photos with lines roughly added? One part that has come to light is turning a current ancient footpath into a 4x4 access road. This is extremely steep the vehicles will create gullies and new water run offs and currently the path is only 1.5 to 1.9 meters wide. It would need a significant dig out and workings to get it to at least 3 meters and usable for 4x4 vehicles and again will then exclude all other groups from using an ancient walking path just to accommodate the bikers. GNE are wanting to rent land for an uphill access trail. This does not seem to appear in their planning application only reference to a lower climb trail planned to be 3.5 meters wide, obviously for vehicles? Exactly where GNE are wanting to drive vehicles on the hill needs making clear and again using an OS Map not a screen print from a google earth photo with rough routes drawn on it!

There are already 20 kilometres plus of downhill bike trails on the hill, why do we need more and destroy yet further areas of heathland with the knock on effects to wildlife?

Wildlife Protection

This is something I attach great importance to and I would hope your committee do to? Sadly to date the behaviour of some of the mountain bikers currently using the hill is disgraceful and actually in some cases criminal and I fear the vast increase in bikers will be reflected in the disturbance and death of more birds, and destruction of habitat. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] ?

In the last 14 months [REDACTED] the following [REDACTED]).

1. During the hot dry spell last summer and following a shower, House Martins were drinking from a puddle when two bikers came down the track and seeing the birds and puddle deliberately changed course and rode through them. These birds are majestic flyers but are slow to get airborne. Sadly one was killed. [REDACTED] as they rode off. It had flown 5000 miles to be killed by a moron on a bike!

2. Earlier in the year there were two young Buzzards in the area. One morning one landed in the middle of the lane, a large bird and easily seen especially as this was on one of the straight sections. A black VW golf with mountain bike on a rear rack came along the road and couldn't be bothered to stop or slow down even though there was plenty of time and space. The driver ran over the bird and killed it!

3. There has been a considerable increase in bikers on the hill at night with powerful lights. A short while ago there was a vehicle using the forestry tracks at night and several bikers on the hill. Firstly this really does disturb wildlife and occurrences will increase if this development is allowed. On this occasion in the morning [REDACTED] crushed in the road track where the vehicle had been the fresh body of a dead Tawny Owl undoubtedly run over the night before.

I saw detail from GNE that they had carried out a survey of the area with amongst others the help of the RSPB and there did not appear to be an issue with protected species birds and animals. [REDACTED] the RSPB head office who control surveys [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] have no knowledge of GNE or a survey.

[REDACTED] on a daily basis in summer, and just raptors, we see Ospreys, Red Kites, Buzzards, Sparrow hawks and Owls at night. Up until the May biking events we also saw a pair of young Goshawks [REDACTED] but after all the noise including the use of air horns all day we haven't seen them since. This has been reported to the Police. GNE also seem to have ignored the Goshawk nest [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] well inside the protection zone, FLS know exactly where it is.

As for mammals not being evident. Aside Red Squirrels, Badgers, Deer, Foxes, Voles, Mice, and Hedgehogs amongst others which you can see on a daily basis, there are quite a few Pine Martins one of which is actually brave enough to feed [REDACTED]

██████████). We did notice again after the events in May it was some time before we saw any of them around here again.

At the very least now and the condition of any lease, given the behaviour at events the exclusion zone around the known Goshawk nest should be enforced and mean no disturbance in the area and this would include the car park with its uplift vehicles in the nesting season 1st March to 31st August. One of the civil car park contractors said they would be reluctant to work that close to a schedule 1 protected bird during the nesting season. If they know it's there then they are responsible if their non-emergency groundworks disturb it. What are GNE plans? Basically given the nest site proximity and the noise and disturbance that will come from the bikers in the car park and their paddock this area should not be used in the nesting season and certainly given the awful behaviour documented by FLS no events during this period.

Events seem to be a key element to income generation will GNE be able to lease or rent out the site to other groups in addition to the five events they plan to hold?

Safe Access to all groups.

If this development goes ahead it will be for the sole purpose of satisfying a group of downhill bikers, not forestry off road biking, to the exclusion of all other groups. Aside families who will no longer be able to let children run free on the tracks and enjoy looking at the countryside around them, GNE have made no provision including safety for groups such as horse riders.

██████████ the Police about using 4x4 vehicles on public tracks such as forestry and rules governing them as I feel people will no longer be able to safely ride on the hills here. In recent time following some horrific fatalities the highway code rules where horses and riders are concerned were tightened and the Police believe these should form the basis for vehicles on public areas wherever motorised transport is used. Highway code rules 163, 214 and 215.

1. Give horses at least a 2 meter gap.

This should work at the moment, although some bikers have actually clipped horses when passing at far to higher speeds than they should.

2. Speed should be kept to UNDER 10 mph.

GNE have already indicated speeds will be in excess of that.

3. Noise No horns etc or high revving of engines.

Given 4x4 vehicles will be fully loaded including a trailer going uphill they will require a low gear and if wet, low ration, and high revs guaranteed to spook a horse.

4. Take extra care or stop if a horse is being led.

This is especially important when coming up from behind horses, if a rider is being led by another horse, stop.

5. Signals

Riders use a number of hand signals. Make sure all drivers are aware of them. Note this is especially important when you meet horse on the road, how many of your authorities drivers know them?

6. Treat all horses as unpredictable.

There are three brains at work here and one of them is the horse. Be patient and quiet.

Be aware it is legal to lead a horse riding two abreast on roads and to protect young riders by keeping them on the inside. The total width requirement of the track including the 4x4 will need to be 2.5 meters for two horses, 2 meters for a safety gap and 3 meters for the 4x4. Total track width 7.5 meters. The current main tracks and those proposed are nowhere near that width and the environmental destruction to widen them would be considerable. It's either destroy more of the environment or access will just be for the bikers to get a lift up the hill, solely a commercial opportunity, instead of cycling up as is current practice here and at Tarland and far more beneficial to health.

I note that the Aberdeenshire Council already seem to have invested in downhill mountain biking at the Lecht? This mirrors the facilities available on the continent where the skiing resorts utilise the lifts for bikers out of the snow season and which is extremely popular. GNE seem to disagree with the rest of Europe or is this because there is no commercial benefit to them if riders go to the Lecht? This area offers no financial gain for FLS either!

Questions and Thoughts

There is no independent economic assessment of GNE figures?

Benefits are speculative. This is a dangerous niche sport, it's not just forestry off road cycling. Serious injuries are one of the highest from any sport and younger children according to bikers I have spoken to on the hill should not participate. I have spoken to two schools and neither would support their children being involved in downhill mountain biking.

The partnerships with schools etc are all proposed. Who have GNE approached and what partnerships have they achieved?

There are no ongoing commitments to bio diversity, why?

How can there be any confidence in GNE sustaining a 25 year lease?

Where is the performance analysis, feedback, cut off points for unachieved performance?

Given their declaration of working with the RSPB that they have no knowledge of, who have they actually contacted names and organisations, view the reports and findings?

GNE say they have support of local landowners. Who, evidence? As far as I know there is only one landowner and he apparently is against this development.

Family friendly spectator areas don't seem to appear on the planning application. Is this more cutting into the heathland, and where are they on an OS Map?

How will there be enhanced recreational benefit if all other users can't access the area because of 4x4 operations?

Who are the Monymusk business owners GNE are consulting with? All the village has is a fine dining small restaurant, not even a shop?

With any commercial business plan and that is what this is, set up costs have to have a contingency for overspend. Speaking to the civils group with the terrain and granite, excavation costs should have a contingency of at least 10% of the total cost for overspend. Where is it in GNE budget. This type of lane is really not suitable for 30 tonne plus earth removal and hard core delivery trucks. It breaks up with the limited amount of traffic constantly. Authorities now may either impose a weight limit on vehicles increasing the construction costs or insist any damage, which there could well be is repaired by the developer. Again no contingency costs or conversations with roads development seem to be evident?

An assumption is that the project will make a small profit in the first year. Looking at their finance calculations even as they stand without adding some of the missing costs and potential risks there appears to be a loss not a small profit. How are losses going to be funded? Shouldn't the financial statement be scrutinised by a professional team of business planning accountants?

The business plan does not seem to reflect operational wage costs in relation to what would be anticipated looking at their plans. I know there was talk of volunteers but as yet there is no structure for this, who are these volunteers, how many, and what commitments have GNE identified. Also if it's volunteer based in any way it detracts from anyone in the area being employed something GNE believe is a great reason for going ahead. What is GNE employment plans in terms of Full Time Equivalents against volunteers and what will responsibilities be times and days? Nothing is really clear in their budget.

A warning here and research evidence is available about the difficulties associated with relying on volunteers over a period of time. There is always a honeymoon period of initial enthusiasm but then volunteers drop away and they are not necessarily easy to replace. This lease is 25 years, do GNE seriously think they will be able to maintain a volunteer team for that long?

This is not, looking at their history and business plan submitted to FLS for CATS approval, GNE's first attempt to create a commercial business opportunity in this area and when you drill down it appears to be just for the benefit of a niche group of adrenaline seeking bikers and commercial gain. As with their two previous attempts permission or in this case CAT should be refused. This area is for the benefit of all and especially the community of place not just a community of interest group of bikers.

As of the 9th September 2026 the Community Council (CC) after giving GNE several opportunities to convince them and the residents of Monymusk who we know are overwhelmingly against the project, that this will be of great benefit to them and the area, have decided after much consideration that they oppose the development. It's not in the interests of the environment, residents or visitors.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Planning Application Reference: APP/2026/1295
Date: 13 September 2026 17:02:59

Proposal: Formation of Bike Trails, Car Park, Toilet and Associated Works
 Site: Pitfichie Forest, Inverurie
 Applicant: Gravitate North East (GNE)

Objection submitted on behalf of a resident of Monymusk, Aberdeenshire

I wish to formally object to the above planning application. While I recognise the potential recreational benefits of mountain biking facilities, the scale and location of this proposal raise serious concerns regarding road safety, community impact, and the cumulative burden on Monymusk's already stretched infrastructure.

1. Inadequate consideration of traffic impact on Monymusk

The application proposes a new car park and associated facilities at Pitfichie Forest. The supporting documentation acknowledges that there are currently no formal visitor facilities on site, with riders and other users already parking in logging laydown areas, the forest entrance, and passing places on the public road. This existing ad-hoc parking is already a source of congestion and unsafe manoeuvring on local roads.

The introduction of a formal car park and two new mountain bike trails will inevitably attract a significant increase in visitor numbers. The local road network, particularly the B993 and the junction at Monymusk, is not designed to accommodate this level of traffic. The B993/Monymusk junction has been identified as dangerous, with vehicles travelling at speeds of up to 60mph and limited visibility when pulling out. An influx of cars, vans, and uplift vehicles will exacerbate this hazard, putting both residents and visitors at risk.

The application does not appear to include a robust Traffic Management Plan or any mitigation measures such as speed restrictions, passing places, or traffic calming. Without such measures, the development will materially increase the risk of accidents on roads that are already unsafe.

2. Impact on vulnerable road users and children

Monymusk has a small park that is frequently used by young children and older residents, many of whom cross the road unaccompanied. The existing volume and speed of traffic already make this a daily concern for parents and carers. The additional traffic generated by the bike trails including large uplift vehicles and trailers will make the road environment significantly more dangerous for these children.

The application fails to demonstrate how the safety of vulnerable road users, particularly children, will be protected. I would ask the Council to require a detailed Pedestrian and Child Safety Assessment as a condition of any approval, but in my view the risks are so great that the proposal should be refused in its current form.

3. Pressure on limited community facilities

Monymusk is a small village with extremely limited amenities. The village shop operates on a part-time basis, and the Grant Arms restaurant is open only on Friday and Saturday evenings and Sunday lunchtimes, with occasional coffee hours. These facilities are already stretched and are not equipped to serve a large influx of visitors.

The proposed development would place additional pressure on these services without any corresponding investment in community infrastructure. Visitors drawn to the bike trails will likely find few places to eat, drink, or use toilet facilities in the village, leading to informal parking and potentially anti-social behaviour. The application does not address how these impacts will be managed.

4. Existing speed limit and road safety concerns

It is well documented that existing users of the limited resources at Pitfichie Forest already exceed the speed limit, and during summer months there is a marked increase in traffic. The local community has raised concerns about how traffic from the estate is to be managed, along with access for emergency and medical services. The proposed development will only intensify these problems.

The application does not propose any measures to enforce speed limits or to manage the behaviour of visitors. Without such measures, the development will simply compound an existing safety problem.

5. Cumulative impact and lack of mitigation

This application must be considered in the context of cumulative impact. The Pitfichie area is already a popular destination for mountain bikers, and the existing trails are used without formal facilities. The addition of a car park, toilets, and new trails will significantly increase the attractiveness and capacity of the site, drawing visitors from a wider area and at all times of year.

The supporting documents do not include an adequate assessment of the cumulative traffic, environmental, or community impacts. There is no evidence of consultation with the local community about how these impacts will be mitigated. The public information meeting held on 7th September 2026 was a welcome opportunity for discussion, but it does not substitute for a proper impact assessment.

For the reasons set out above, I respectfully request that Aberdeenshire Council, and the Forestry and Land refuse this planning application.

Your sincerely



This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

OBJECTION FROM A LOCAL RESIDENT TO GNE's APPLICATION FOR CATS.

([REDACTED])

Objection 1. Lack of Community Consultation about Mountain Biking in Pitfichie Forest for 30 years and now this!

FLS has failed to follow its own Communities Strategy by not consulting the local community about the expansion of mountain biking in Pitfichie Forest over many years. This is inconsistent with *Principle 3: Engaging and Involving Communities in decision making*. It has also failed to follow its Visitor Strategy, which states FLS gives priority to communities

Prior this CATS application, FLS has **NEVER** consulted the local community about the expansion of mountain biking on Pitfichie for 30 years, despite its own Communities Strategy and Visitor Strategy. The local community is now being given a very short time to respond to a major development.

The current Land Management Plan 2017 (due for revision in 2027)

- does **NOT** propose expanding the network of mountain bike trails,
- does **NOT** reference partnering with Aberdeenshire Trails Association to maintain the unofficial trail network,
- does **NOT** identify increasing use of the forest for mountain biking events,
- does **NOT** include plans to develop a downhill mountain bike race track.
- FLS did **NOT** consult the local community about the Mid Term Review and Amendments proposed changes to re-stocking after the storms Arwen and Corrie, but did consult both Scottish Cycling and Aberdeenshire Trails Association.
- In contrast, the Bennachie Forest LMP clearly identifies “a primary objective to maintain the quality of the site for recreation in order to further encourage tourism within the site.”
- Residents are now being asked to respond to GNE's proposal to develop a Pitfichie Hill Mountain Bike Centre in less than a month, despite having had no opportunity to influence mountain biking developments on Pitfichie in the last 30 years . Many local residents believe that FLS is giving greater weight to the interests of a relatively small specialist user group than to those of the wider community. A survey of Monymusk households earlier in the year clearly showed most respondents were **NOT** in favour of GNEs proposal.
- [FLS route card](#) promotes the Granite Top trail, the Pitfichie Downhill Trail “ *it would be dangerous for walkers to use it*”, and a multi-user trail around Cairn William. In my experience the Pitfichie trail is dangerous for other users, so it is not surprising that GNE does not find many other users on this trail . Locals used to walk on Pitfichie before mountain bikers made it so unsafe.

- [The Cycle Grampian website](#) says” *There are two official Forestry Commission Scotland way marked cross country trails, a suicidal downhill course and nearly 30 unofficial trails and routes to explore. Overall you can expect 12 access road type trails, 4 blue graded trails, 8 red, 6 black and 1 proline trail. The proline being the downhill course.*”
- The [Trailforks](#) website identifies yet more unofficial mountain bike trails nt only on Pitfichie but on nearby FLS land too.
- The GNE proposal is the first time in 30 years that local residents have been able to have a say about the expansion of mountain bike trails in Pitfichie Forest. Most locals do NOT want any more trails.
- It is very obvious that the uplift will give mountain bikers access to other trails on the hill, yet GNE do not mention this, nor are they proposing to take responsibility for maintaining other trails. (FLS have abrogated responsibility to volunteers in Aberdeenshire Trails Association.

Objection 2. Conflicts with SOAC (Scottish Outdoor Access Code)

- The intention of SOAC is to support responsible access for all. The GNE proposal appears to prioritise a specialist sporting activity (GNE claims it has 25 core members) that will increase risks and conflicts with other recreational users. Will this lease remove access rights for other users? GNE make no mention of this. The FLS route card already notes that the Pitfichie Downhill Trail is dangerous for other users.
- FC constructed an official mountain bike trail over Cairn William and Pitfichie in the mid 1990s. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] From memory the cost was something like £30/linear metre – public sector bodies were much better resourced at the time.
- Later, in the 2000s, FCS had to adopt the orange trail on Pitfichie in order to stem erosion caused when mountain bikers began using it for competitions.
- Bikers have expanded the network of trails beyond the official routes causing erosion and environmental damage in some locations, including on the top of Cairn William. Mountain bikers now promote 20 km of mountain bike trails in the forest which they have developed without any consultation with other forest users. They still promote the dangerous Slippy Willy trail, an erosion eyesore that should be closed.
- The bike trail network has **not** been properly maintained for 20+ years. Recently FLS have had to make a deal with Aberdeenshire Trails Association to try to get some trails maintained but using volunteer labour! Volunteer-led maintenance can not be sufficient to ensure safe maintenance across such an extensive network. FLS did **not** consult with other recreational users or with the local community about this arrangement.
- SOAC requires land managers and recreational users to ‘respect the interests of others’ and ‘take responsibility for your own actions’. FLS and mountain bikers do **not** adhere to these principles. The proposal raises concerns about whether

these principles are being applied consistently where high-speed downhill riding takes place alongside pedestrians, horse riders, and other forest users.

- Mountain bikers have caused problems all over Scotland by their self-interested 'me first' behaviour and cavalier unofficial track building. The widespread nature of the problem is such that FLS had to produce a Guide for land managers about unauthorized Mountain Bike Trails. FLS are now rewarding this vociferous user group, over other users who stick to the rules.
- Downhill mountain bike racing is a competitive sport, like skiing, it is **not** active travel. It is **not** safe to mix speeding racing bikes with slower pedestrian or equine recreational users, nor is it wise to mix them with uplift vehicles. Personally, I have had bad encounters with mountain bikers speeding downhill in Pitfichie Forest and with the uplift vehicle they used in previous years. I have not had the same problems with other recreational users in the forest.
- The third SOAC principle is 'care for the environment'. Those who create unauthorised mountain bike trails which damage the vegetation, cause erosion, damage peat, widen trails and disturb wildlife are **not** adhering to this principle. Surveys commissioned by mountain bikers claim they like being outdoors and like the landscape...this is **not** the same as caring the environment.
- SOAC does not extend to motorised access, so GNEs proposal to use vehicles for uplift on forest roads and tracks does **not** comply with SOAC. Will FLS revoke SOAC in the GNE development? GNE do not mention this. Questions remain regarding access arrangements, road usage, and whether mountain biking activities are being given preferential treatment compared with other users. The mountain bikers have had priority access to an informal car park in Pitfichie for many years, but other users were not granted the same privilege. [REDACTED] them driving their cars at speed on the forest road and of having to jump quickly, I think because they couldn't do a proper hill start on the steep gravelly bealach track.
- The GNE CATS submission does not mention removing SOAC rights.
- The GNE application does **not** clearly explain who will be responsible for managing the existing 20km trail network if visitor numbers increase significantly – GNE project 20,000 customers. This will inevitably increase pressure on other parts of the trail network. GNE conclusion that the 'facility' will be well managed', is not substantiated.

Objection 3. Climate Change and Biodiversity Concerns

- The GNE proposal for downhill mountain bike racing sport centre does **NOT** align with FLS policies on climate change mitigation and biodiversity protection.
- Scotland acknowledges there is a climate crisis. The GNE proposal adds to this crisis, it does **not** benefit climate and goes **against** FLS visitor policy to develop visitor facilities with sustainable transport solutions. The GNE proposal will generate more traffic from far and wide onto narrow rural roads and through the village. The proposal is also to use will CO₂ emitting vehicles for uplifting bikes to

the top of the trails! The GNE proposal benefits a niche sporting community of interest, whilst disadvantaging other users and local residents. The GNE project will increase emissions, whilst we should all be striving to reduce emissions.

- Scotland acknowledges there is a biodiversity crisis and FLS has a statutory duty to further conservation of biodiversity. The GNE proposal includes the usual greenwashing claims made by a developer to benefit biodiversity. The 40m corridor which GNE propose to manage for biodiversity in their biodiversity plan is **not** included in the CATs application for a lease, nor in the planning application. GNE propose to manage biodiversity on land owned and managed by FLS. How does this integrate with the FLS Land Management Plan and forestry operations?
- Scottish Forestry considers Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) to be high priority candidates for restoration, yet FLS plans for the PAWS in Pitfichie Forest are minimal and may not comply with UKWAS. Ancient woodlands are usually managed as a whole, not in 40m strips corridor (not even part of the lease) adjacent to a downhill race track. The 40 m biodiversity corridor does not sit well with the Land Management Plan.
- GNE have **no** experience of biodiversity management. Their proposal states that “Biodiversity Development will be responsible for the delivery of biodiversity projects, volunteer engagement, and environmental partnerships.” It is not clear what this means.
- The business plan shows GNE has **not** allocated any money for restoration and maintenance of biodiversity (in the 40 m corridor on FLS land!). GNEs biodiversity measures are planned for phase 4 – Growth and Evaluation – but GNE give no timeline for phase 4. Timelines are only specified are for the construction and opening of the racing track and car park.
- GNE make **no** mention of mitigating the **disturbance** to wildlife caused by the construction, maintenance and use of the downhill racing tracks. They also fail to mention that they use these tracks day and night, impacting both diurnal and nocturnal creatures. This is not acceptable for the Protected Species who live in the forest, for whom this is home. Furthermore FLS oblige contractors and others to abide by Codes of Practice to avoid harming wildlife; why are mountain bikers not obliged to follow the same codes of practice?
- There is peat in Pitfichie Forest. Some of the unauthorised mountain bike trails have already cut through this peat causing damage and erosion, more intensive use of the trails will exacerbate the problem. Despite the detailed plans for the new race tracks, GNE admitted, during a visit to the Tarland Trails, that parts of the new racing tracks could be up to 4m wide ie much wider than stated 1.5 to 2m. Neither the CATS submission nor the planning application mention this mission creep.
- GNEs proposal lies within a Special Landscape Area. There is **no** evidence that GNE have considered this in the designs for the downhill race track, biodiversity corridor or supporting infrastructure such as the car park.

- Diseases like Phytophthora are an increasing headache for forest managers. The GNE proposal does **not** include any biosecurity measures to reduce the spread of tree diseases and pathogens. There is no water supply to clean the bikes in the car park.

Objection 4. Financial Sustainability

- The FLS Visitor Strategy requires projects to be financially sustainable. The GNE business plan does not provide sufficient confidence in the financial viability or sustainability of the project.
- GNE has already wasted public money trying to develop other sites for downhill racing. The cost of the GNE development per capita ie per elite mountain bike racer, is scandalous when many people are suffering a cost of living crisis. GNE state that their core membership is 25 core members (s5.1) but they are proposing to develop a facility costing £1.1m (capital costs) which is dangerous for other users!
- The GNE business model relies on uplift charges, parking fees and assumptions about visitor numbers using a £35 for uplift charge, plus car parking charges for non-racers. Are the 25 core members really going to pay £35/day when they can use Tarland Trails by paying for car parking only. What happens if the business fails? Will GNE be responsible for re-instating the race track and infrastructure? The business plan does **not** identify risks or risk management measures or contingency measures.
- The business plan does **not** include a budget for biodiversity management. So who is paying for that?
- Claims regarding ‘rural development’ (aka ‘rural destruction’) are also questionable. The estimate of bringing £250,000 annually into the local economy is not explained. Monymusk has a part-time café and thrift shop. Local residents know that the mountain bikers who have used Pitfichie for the last 20 years have demonstrably **not** kept local businesses open - the village shop, the hotel and even the bike shop in the village have all closed! It is more common to see road cyclists at the Grant Arms café.
- When there are competitive events, attendees arrive in camper vans and mobile catering is contracted in. Local residents doubt there will be any local benefit from the GNE proposal, instead they will be disadvantaged by the increase in racing bikes, traffic and noise. The only people who will benefit are the small number of mountain biker racers, only a couple of whom live locally, and mobile catering businesses. This is Mountain Biking Centre development is for the few, not the many.

- The GNE proposal seems to suggest that the Council will need to widen the road to accommodate extra traffic. It is not explained why local people should pay taxes to improve the road to an elite race track most people do not want.

My assessment against CATS evaluation criteria

Benefits – GNEs proposal fails to contribute to any national outcomes (the forest is already used for recreation) but it will have an unwanted negative impact on the local community. Assessment = Negative ranking.

Viability – GNE have some initial funding, but not all of the £1.1m needed to start building their race track. They will depend on income from uplift and car parking charges to maintain it. The business case seems very weak. There is no budget allocation for biodiversity management on FLS land (which is not include in the CATS application). Assessment = Low or negative ranking.

Community Support and Wider Public benefit – there is widespread local community opposition to GNE’s proposal to establish a Pitfichie Hill Mountain Biking Centre; the support primarily comes from those directly involved in downhill mountain bike racing for whom the project is exclusively designed. Assessment = Negative ranking.

Management of National Forests and Land – It is unclear how the proposal would make a positive contribution to the management of the wider forest estate or address existing concerns about trail maintenance, environmental protection, and community engagement. Assessment = Low or negative ranking.

GNE’s Conclusion

The Pitfichie Hill Mountain Biking Centre will transform an already popular riding destination into a well-managed, environmentally responsible, and economically sustainable facility. The project directly supports Scottish Government priorities for participation, sporting achievement, tourism growth, and rural regeneration. Crucially, it achieves this while addressing longstanding concerns regarding site management, environmental protection, and community impact. Through partnership working, community leadership, and responsible stewardship, Gravitare North East will successfully establish Pitfichie Hill as a flagship example of sustainable mountain biking development in Scotland.

My Conclusion

The Pitfichie Hill Mountain Biking Centre will further wreck a popular local hill used by many recreational users which mountain bikers seem to think belongs to them. The existing trail network is not well maintained, and GNEs proposal provides no evidence that this will improve since they will only manage the race track. GNE has no experience of biodiversity management; they propose to use volunteers to manage biodiversity on a 40m corridor of FLS land without allocating any money. The claims to bring 'rural regeneration' (what is that?) is unsubstantiated and the claim that the project will be economically sustainable is at best marginal and does not identify risks nor risk management should the project fail. The proposal does **NOT** address any of the concerns of local residents about the long-standing concerns about site management, environmental protection or community impact.

Consequently, I suggest FLS adhere to its own policies and reject GNEs CATS application.

Some Good News

The **good news** is that the Lecht Activity Centre would be delighted to have more mountain bikers racing downhill because the snow season for skiers is shrinking. The Lecht already has good road access, car parking and a café, uplift facilities, and maintenance machinery and staff. More downhill mountain bikers would be welcome at the Lecht.

Mountain bikers can already use the 17km of trails opened at Tarland 2023 where there is already a car park but no uplift facilities.

A local resident

(Name withheld on this document for fear of mountain biker intimidation behaviour.)

25 August 2026

79 WHY ABERDEENSHIRE NEEDS A DOWNHILL MOUNTAIN BIKE FACILITY

Supporting Statement for the Gravitare Project

 Dialled In Coaching and organiser of Dialled In Downhill. I have spent over a decade racing mountain bikes, progressing from riding in the north-east of Scotland to competing at British, Scottish and World Cup level.

I now work full-time as a mountain bike coach and organise downhill racing in Aberdeenshire. I have also been involved in trail development locally.

I have therefore experienced the same issue from several sides: **as a young rider trying to progress, as a racer, as a coach developing riders, and now as an event organiser trying to grow downhill racing in the north-east.**

There is a clear gap in Aberdeenshire's mountain bike infrastructure.

We have riders, coaches, clubs, events and a strong mountain bike community. What we do not have is a purpose-built, uplift-accessed downhill facility capable of providing a complete progression pathway.

WHY DOWNHILL NEEDS A DIFFERENT TYPE OF FACILITY

Downhill mountain biking is different from conventional trail-centre riding.

A downhill bike is designed primarily for descending. Riders cannot realistically spend a full training day repeatedly pushing heavy downhill bikes back to the top of a large hill.

That is why **uplift access is so important.**

Using vehicles and trailers to transport riders back to the top allows them to complete repeated runs. Instead of spending most of the day getting back uphill, riders can spend that time actually riding, practising and progressing.

For developing riders, repetition is everything.

A properly designed facility could provide progressive downhill tracks, starting with accessible terrain and building towards technically demanding tracks constructed to a standard capable of hosting national-level competition.

This creates a natural pathway:

Learn → Practise → Progress → Grassroots Racing → National Racing → International Racing

At present, that pathway does not fully exist in Aberdeenshire.

KEEPING PROGRESSION LOCAL

I know this problem personally.

I grew up riding and racing in the north-east of Scotland and eventually progressed to British-level racing and World Cups.

One of the biggest challenges of trying to reach that level from Aberdeenshire is access to suitable downhill terrain and facilities.

As riders progress, they increasingly have to travel elsewhere in Scotland and the UK to train and race.

For young riders, this is an even greater barrier because progression depends on parents having the time and money to repeatedly transport them long distances.

Gravitate could change that.

If the tracks are designed correctly, with genuine progression and ultimately national-level difficulty, young riders could develop the skills required for British Downhill racing **before having to leave Aberdeenshire to find appropriate terrain.**

That doesn't remove the need to travel and experience other tracks. It gives riders the foundation that allows that travel to become the next step rather than the starting point.

COACHING, SAFETY AND RESPONSIBLE PROGRESSION

As a professional coach, I see the importance of progressive terrain every week.

Riders develop best when they can learn a skill on an appropriate feature, repeat it and gradually increase the difficulty.

A purpose-built facility would allow coaching of braking, cornering, jumping, drops, technical terrain, line choice and race skills in a controlled progression.

This isn't simply about making riders faster.

Better-skilled riders are safer, more controlled and better able to assess terrain and understand their own limits.

That benefits riders, parents, coaches, trail managers, landowners and the wider mountain bike community.

GRASSROOTS TO NATIONAL-LEVEL RACING

Through organising **Dialled In Downhill**, I have seen the demand for accessible downhill racing in the north-east.

Grassroots events give riders their first experience of competition. But if we want riders to continue progressing, there needs to be somewhere for the next step to happen.

A facility capable of hosting both **grassroots and national-level downhill racing** would create something currently missing from this part of Scotland.

A child could learn to ride there, receive coaching, enter their first grassroots race, develop into a competitive rider and eventually race a national-level event on the same hillside.

From there, British Downhill and potentially World Cup racing becomes a much more natural progression.

Scotland has a strong international reputation for downhill mountain biking. Creating facilities capable of developing the next generation of riders helps protect and build that reputation.

MORE THAN A FACILITY FOR RACERS

It is important that Gravitare isn't viewed simply as a facility for a small number of elite downhill racers.

The pathway may lead to national and international competition, but **the facility serves everyone underneath that level too.**

It gives young people somewhere to develop.

It gives recreational riders somewhere to improve.

It gives coaches appropriate terrain to teach on.

It gives grassroots racers somewhere to train.

It gives clubs and communities somewhere to meet.

It creates opportunities for events.

And it gives Aberdeenshire a mountain bike facility capable of attracting riders from outside the area.

THE WIDER ECONOMIC BENEFIT

Mountain bikers travel for good riding.

An uplift-accessed downhill venue capable of hosting high-quality riding and racing has the potential to bring riders from across Scotland and the wider UK into Aberdeenshire.

Those riders do not only spend money at the facility.

They need accommodation. They eat in cafés, pubs and restaurants. They buy fuel. They visit bike shops. They purchase equipment. Families travelling with young riders spend time and money in the surrounding area.

Events amplify this.

A national-level downhill race can bring riders, families, teams, event staff and spectators into an area for an entire weekend.

A successful facility therefore has the potential to support **tourism, local businesses, employment and the wider visitor economy**, while strengthening Aberdeenshire's reputation as a mountain bike destination.

The benefit extends considerably beyond the people riding the tracks.

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ABERDEENSHIRE

This is not about building difficult downhill tracks simply for the sake of having them.

It is about creating infrastructure that Aberdeenshire currently does not have.

A purpose-built, uplift-accessed facility could connect participation, coaching, progression and competition in one location.

It could give a beginner their first experience of downhill riding and give an aspiring racer access to terrain capable of preparing them for national competition.

It could host grassroots events while having the potential to bring national-level racing to the north-east.

It could reduce a major geographical barrier faced by young riders and families.

And it could bring visitors, events and economic activity into the surrounding area.

Having grown up trying to progress as a downhill racer from the north-east, and now working as a coach and race organiser trying to create those opportunities for the next generation, I believe a facility like Gravitare could make a significant difference.

Aberdeenshire already has the riders and the community.

Gravitare is an opportunity to give them the facility to progress — while creating something that can benefit the wider region.



Dialled In Coaching Ltd

Dialled In Downhill

Mountain Bike Coach | Rider | Race Organiser

80 FRIENDS OF PITFICHIE

Response to the Gravitare North East Community Asset Transfer Request

Pitfichie Hill, near Monymusk

Prepared for consideration with the FLS CATS Evaluation Panel Assessment Template

Purpose of this submission

This submission sets out the concerns of Friends of Pitfichie (FOP) using the headings and assessment questions in the FLS CATS Evaluation Panel Assessment Template. Its purpose is to assist the Evaluation Panel in testing the evidence supplied by Gravitare North East (GNE), rather than simply repeating FOP's planning objection in a different format.

Friends of Pitfichie is an organisation concerned with the protection of the natural environment, wildlife and heritage of the area in and around Monymusk. FOP's views on the proposed development by GNE have been formed following considerable research and are, wherever possible, based on evidence. FOP's community survey recorded 217 respondents opposed to the development and 25 in favour. The survey therefore provides evidence of substantial local concern (**see the attached community survey report**).

FOP is not opposed to mountain biking as an activity. Some members are active mountain bikers and use the trails on Pitfichie Hill. Its objection is to this particular proposal, including the scale and intensity of the proposed facility, the uplift operation, access and traffic implications, effects on landscape and biodiversity, impacts on other recreational users, and the adequacy of the evidence supporting the claimed community, economic, health and environmental benefits.

Key Objections

- Community support is low, with FOP survey evidence recording substantial local opposition (217 respondents against and 25 in favour).
- The application does not demonstrate sufficient evidence of net public benefit to justify a 25-year lease.
- Significant uncertainty remains regarding visitor forecasts, demand assumptions and long-term financial viability.
- The uplift-vehicle operation is central to the proposal but its route, safety implications and operational impacts remain insufficiently evidenced.
- The proposal would materially intensify use of a forest currently shared by walkers, horse riders, cyclists and families.

- Important discrepancies exist regarding the area of land, rights and management corridor sought under the CAT proposal.
- The ecological baseline is incomplete and relies heavily on limited survey work undertaken in winter conditions.
- Claims of biodiversity gain are largely based on future management aspirations rather than secured and measurable outcomes.
- Traffic, the access route to the car park, parking, event management and village amenity impacts remain insufficiently resolved.
- The proposal contains a number of future intentions and proposed partnerships which are not yet evidenced by binding commitments or measurable delivery plans.

General Overview FOP considers that the application does not demonstrate a sufficiently strong case for granting a 25-year lease of FLS land for the proposed downhill biking centre. Many of GNE's statements appear aspirational rather than factual, measurable and secured. The principal weakness is the gap between the scale of the claimed benefits and the evidence provided to demonstrate that those benefits are real, additional, measurable and deliverable. GNE itself identifies significant uncertainty around visitor numbers, uplift-service costs and the viability of the uplift operation.

The proposal would intensify recreational use at a site already used by walkers, horse riders, cyclists, families and others. FOP is particularly concerned about motorised uplift vehicles sharing the forest routes between the car park and the bealach between Cairn William and Pitfichie Hill.

The biodiversity plan consists largely of proposals that are conditional rather than secured outcomes. FOP considers that these measures are limited when assessed against the overall scale of Pitfichie Forest and the cumulative effects of trails, events, visitor numbers and vehicle movements.

GNE's community-support evidence requires careful scrutiny. GNE reports that 45% of respondents were strongly positive, 30% neutral and 25% strongly negative in its Facebook survey of 80 respondents.

FOP's separate paper survey allowed respondents who were both for and against the proposal to provide comments. It was delivered to the letterboxes of households, most of which were within a three-mile radius of Monymusk, and recorded 217 respondents opposed to the development and 25 in favour. The two surveys were different exercises and should not be treated as directly comparable polling exercises. Nevertheless, the existence of substantial local opposition is material to the CATS assessment. **(see separate Appendix dealing with the survey)**

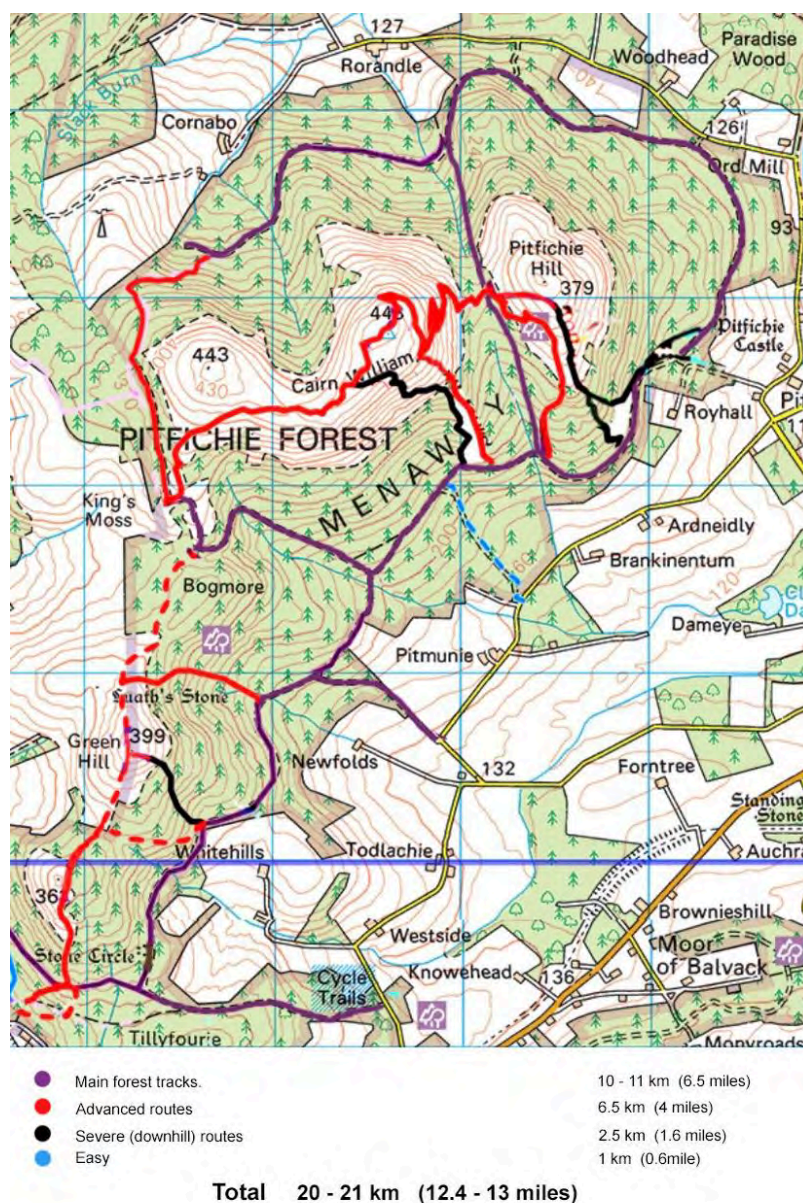
FOP considers that the proposal should be assessed by reference to how many of the CATS criteria are supported by evidence and how many rely primarily on aspirations or future intentions.

1. UTILISATION

CATS question: Does the project maximise the benefits and make best use of the asset in relation to the scale of the asset transfer, taking into account alternative potential uses and benefits?

1.1. The proposed development would dedicate a significant area of the asset to the niche sport of downhill mountain biking. It is important to distinguish downhill biking from mountain biking generally. Downhill biking is more akin to skiing, with riders travelling at speed downhill, whereas conventional mountain biking involves significant physical exertion through pedalling. There are already approximately 21 km (about 13 miles) of cycling trails in Pitfichie Forest, including downhill tracks.

Map 1. Existing cycle trails on Pitfichie Hill and Cairn William



1.2. The figures in **section 2.1** of the application do not add up. The total area GNE wishes to rent is unclear. The CAT application gives a total proposal footprint of 1.24 ha. GNE's Maps and Area Table calculates 1.313 ha of physical infrastructure/tread and 19.949 ha of corridor. The Biodiversity Plan states that GNE is negotiating auxiliary rights extending 20 metres on each side of the trails, identifying 15.5 ha of forest within those corridors. The disparity is further highlighted by the statement in **section 2.1 of the CAT application** that the total footprint is 1.24 ha, comprising approximately 0.35 ha for car parking and the finish area and 0.88 ha of trail treads. Also stated is that 0.78 ha of commercial forest would be taken out of production. GNE's Aberdeenshire Council planning application gives a total area of 1.38 ha. FOP requests that FLS identifies precisely what land and what rights the Panel is being asked to assess.

1.3. This distinction should be made clear when assessing the scale of the transfer and the extent of the land subject to management rights. Our understanding is that the 20 metre verges which will border the trails not only allow GNE to claim a small degree of biodiversity but also gives them latitude for building and modifying their trails within that corridor. To change trails would, in our opinion, require planning permission.

1.4. The map from GNE's Aberdeenshire Council planning application (see below) appears to indicate the precise area that GNE wishes to rent from FLS. Is the Panel satisfied that the extent shown is the same as the land for which GNE has applied under CAT, stated to be 1.24 ha?

Map 2. Location plan submitted to Aberdeenshire Planning Dept. showing precise area of land required.



1.5. The use of uplift vehicles was identified as a concern in FOP's survey. It is not mentioned as one of the concerns raised from GNE's survey (see **CAT application p11 section 4.4**). There is no map in the published material of the CAT application or the planning statement to clearly indicate the precise course that GNE intends to drive vehicles up the hill. On **p7 Section 3.8 of Planning Statement** there is a written description stating: 'The upper climb links the existing turning circle on the high point of the forestry road with the start of DH1 trail. This will replace the current path to the start location, which is steep, straight and therefore subject to erosion. The new route will utilise an existing informal, well established mountain bike trail that meanders up the hill providing access to the start of DH1.' FOP has subsequently received written confirmation from the CC (28/08/26) that the proposed uplift vehicle route follows the path heading north from Ardneidy towards the bealach. (**See Map 3**) The complete motorised uplift route is not clearly identified on the submitted planning drawings.

1.6. FOP wish to know precisely where 'the existing informal, well established mountain bike trail that meanders up the hill' is. FOP have walked this area frequently and are not aware of the location of this trail on the map which accompanies the application. Looking at the map we can see the bealach and the start of the 'upper climb trail'. We are unaware of a turning circle as described on **p7 section 3.8 Upper Climb Trail**.

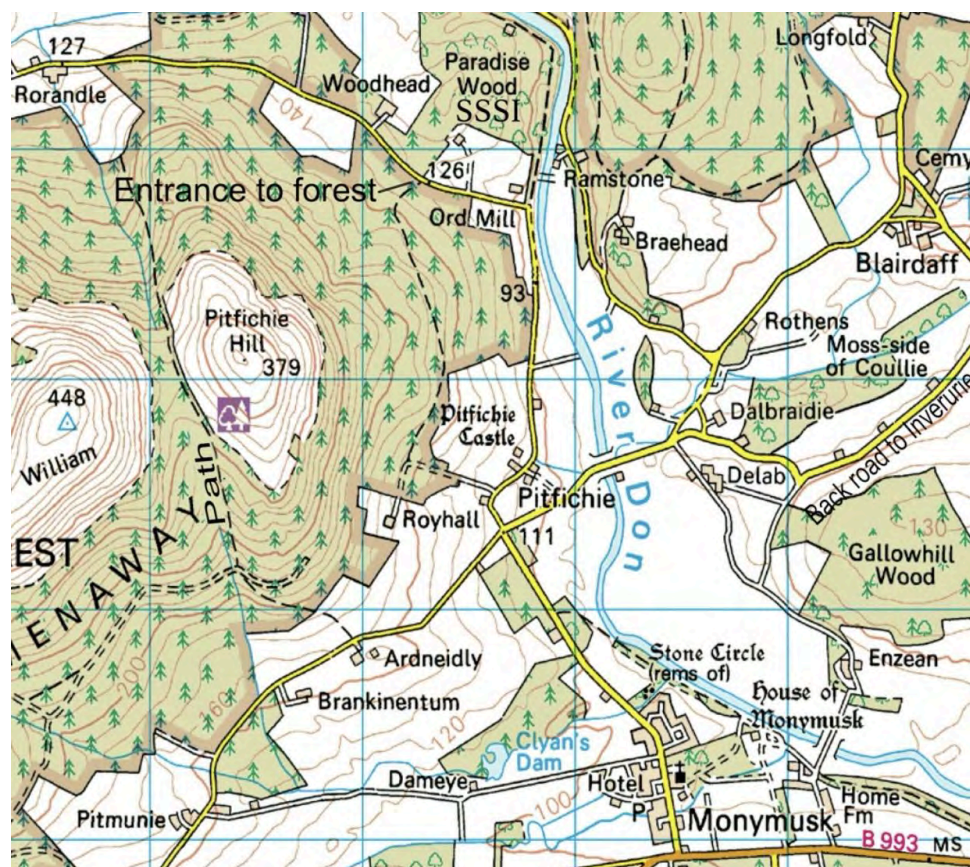
1.7 Under section **2.1 of the CAT** application, under Name and description of the land, GNE say 'an uphill access trail'. We note that there is a 'lower climb trail' of 3.5 metres width. Is this also to be used by motorised vehicles? FOP can find no reference in the documents as to **two** routes for vehicles. Clarification is required to find precisely where motorised vehicles will be intending to travel.

Map 3. Proposed Overall Site Layout Plan submitted to Aberdeenshire Planning Dept.



1.8. According to the information that the CC got from GNE and passed on to FOP, the initial part of the vehicle route is along a well-used forestry track before turning R up the steep path that ascends in an almost straight line to the bealach where the upper climb trail starts. This route is a path. On occasions it has been used by small forestry vehicles and possibly by vehicles at some events. The path is marked as the hatched line on the OS map (see below) running North West from the forest road above Ardneidly, and Northwards over the bealach towards Rorandle. For the panel to see it clearly we have identified it on the map with the word 'path'. It is now used by cyclists as well as walkers but has never been used as a regular forest road. It is steep and narrow with a loose natural surface. The earliest reference to the path is on the 1799 John Innes map.(National Records of Scotland RHP/245 RHP/1895) and it is still marked as a walking path on today's OS map. Several within the community of Monymusk can testify to the fact that, in living memory, this has always been a path.

Map 4. OS Map indicating the route of the path over the bealach, the site of Paradise Wood SSSI and the back road to Inverurie.



Path	Sentier	Fussweg
Gradient : steeper than 20% (1 in 5)		14% à
Pente : Supérieure à 20% (1 pour 5)		14% à
Steigung über 20%		14% bis 20%
Gates	Road tunnel	
Barrières	Tunnel routier	
Schranken	Strassentunnel	
Ferry (passenger)	Ferry (vehicle)	
Bac pour piétons	Bac pour véhicules	
Personenfähre	Autofähre	

1.9. The assessment must weigh up whether the activity of motorised vehicles on a well used and long-established path is compatible with the principles of SOAC. Allowing four wheeled motorised transport on an already eroded, loose and steep surface is likely to create additional risks for walkers and cyclists, deter other users and increase erosion and sediment run-off. FOP opposes a change from an approach that seeks to keep vehicles out of the forest to one that would sanction their regular use. There is no reference as to the type of vehicle to be used. FOP request that the type of vehicles to be used should be stated clearly — in particular as to whether they will be electric or fossil fuel.

1.10. What environmental assessments and permissions have FLS and GNE obtained, or sought, to allow this path to be used regularly by motor vehicles.



1. This photo shows the start of the uphill path as it comes off the forest road. The sign indicates that it is used also as a biking trail. The following photos show existing erosion and sediment run-off.



2



3. The above two photos show the degree of erosion on the path. The shoes are shown here to indicate the width of the path. A single shoe measures 32cms. The width of the path varies from 160 - 190

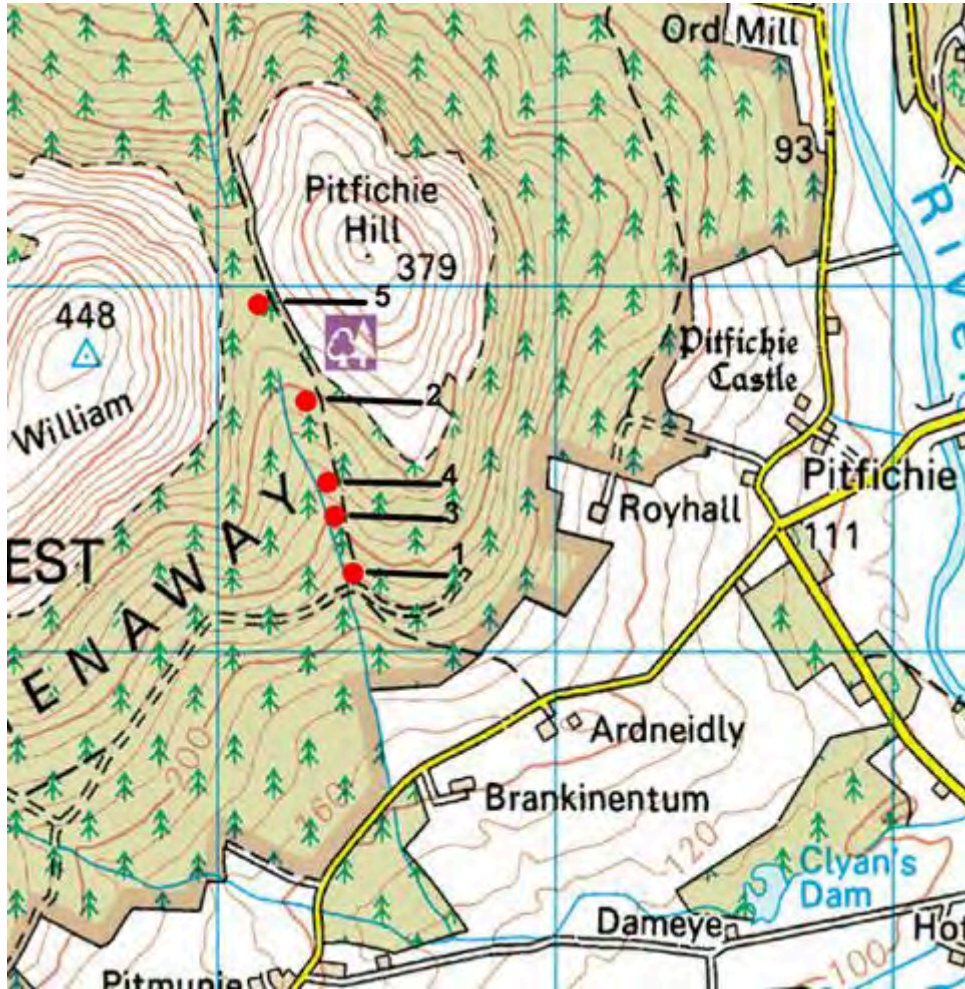


4. The key fob is to give an idea of the size of the fine gravel washed down the path.



5. This is a view of the path looking downhill.

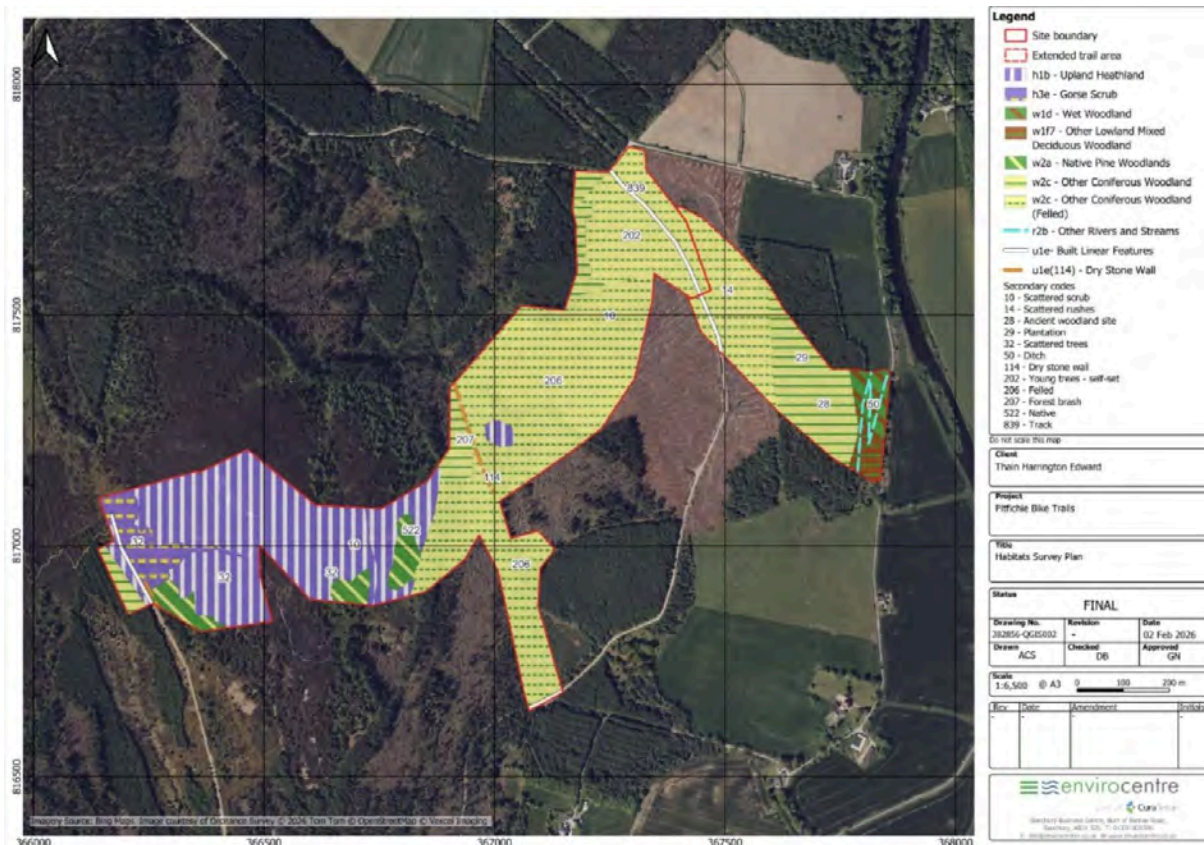
Map 5. This map indicates where the photographs were taken.



1.11. FOP objects to the use of an area of undisturbed heather moorland to construct a more gently inclined 'push-up' track for bikers to reach the top of the hill. A more direct, albeit eroded, path already exists and is currently used by bikers. Constructing a new track through peaty soil and heather in an environmentally sensitive part of the Bennachie Special Landscape Area appears inconsistent with the stated environmental objectives of the proposal. FOP therefore asks how this work is compatible with GNE's assertion that the development will enhance the environment and increase biodiversity?

1.12 With regards to utilisation — we are unsure about the **map on P3 of the biodiversity plan** which shows GNE’s intention to take an arm south easterly from the forest entrance all the way down to the road. This needs clarification. Is this land they wish to rent and manage?

Map 6. From page 3 of GNE’s biodiversity plan



1.13. The Panel should require written, long-term agreements with named local landowners to accommodate overnight stays and off-site parking for weekend events throughout the proposed life of the project, particularly given GNE’s proposal to organise five events per year.

1.14. Parking is relevant to utilisation of forestry land but **see section 6** towards the end of this document for FOP’s more detailed appraisal of parking.

1.15. Pittfichie already has an established mountain-bike network of approximately 20 km of cyclable tracks. (**see map at 1.1**). Both GNE and FOP recognise that the present management arrangements have allowed the unfettered growth of unofficial trails without planning permission. However, a downhill biking centre on the east side of the hill would not, in itself, address the management of trails outside GNE’s proposed area of authority. GNE’s management would be confined to the strip of land containing its trails, car park and finish area. **Section 4.4 of the CAT application** states that existing concerns regarding unsanctioned trail construction will be addressed through site management, ‘enabling trails to be developed, maintained and managed in a coordinated and sustainable manner’. It is important to recognise that GNE would have no management role outside the area it intends

to rent. The application has not demonstrated how a new downhill centre, new trails, a 76-space car park, toilets and a motorised uplift operation are necessary to achieve improved management of biking elsewhere at Pitfichie.

1.16. Section 4.4 P12 of the CAT application: ‘enabling trail development’. FOP would like to draw this wording to the attention of the assessment panel because our survey raised concerns that new trail development might occur once land has been leased to GNE. We feel it important that trail development should have clear parameters agreed at the outset rather than allowing ad hoc building to occur as already happens elsewhere on the hill. With a 25 year lease, what contractual limitations will there be to limit growth of the development and trails?

1.17. The applicant has not demonstrated that Pitfichie is the only, or the best, location for a purpose-built downhill centre. FOP asks the Panel to require written evidence explaining why other potential sites were considered unsuitable or rejected.

1.18. The Panel should distinguish between the case for better management of an existing activity and the separate case for transferring FLS land for a materially expanded visitor facility for 25 years.

2. BENEFITS

2.1 Vision

CATS question: To what extent does the overall vision for the project and project outcomes contribute to Scotland's National Outcomes?

GNE presents the project as supporting health, participation, community development, biodiversity and tourism. FOP accepts that cycling can provide health and recreational benefits.

Health

2.1.1. With about 20 km (13 miles) of mountain biking trails over Cairn William and Pitfichie Hill there is already adequate provision for those wishing to pursue a healthy lifestyle with outdoor exercise.

2.1.2. Downhill biking is a niche sport. The panel are asked to weigh any value felt by those who participate in a sport involving speeding downhill against the loss of tranquility and enjoyment of those who use the forest for other reasons including the act of mountain biking with associated aerobic exercise.

2.1.3. One of the comments from our survey sums it up: “the use of motorised uplift vehicles demonstrates a move away from the promotion of health and enjoyment of the natural environment, to an open “thrills” opportunity at the expense of the countryside and people living there.’ In this case, it is not just those who walk and ride in the forest, it is the village

itself which may be materially affected by an increase in traffic en route to a biking centre. Will this result in any additional health benefits that wouldn't be realised otherwise; because many miles of trails already exist and cater for many user groups on which to exercise?

2.1.4. When measuring 'health' for National Outcomes one must include financial cost. There is good evidence to demonstrate that cycling is healthy. The more you do the less chance you have of suffering heart disease and diabetes. All the evidence for the health benefits of cycling come from studies that involve road cycling inherent in which is the aerobic exercise. There are several studies that examine the risks to riders, the injuries sustained and the need to increase safety for downhill biking. There is no strong health-economic evidence that downhill facilities produce net public health benefit and that, after NHS costs, the balance may be neutral or negative.

2.1.5. The general public health benefits attributed to cycling should not automatically be attributed in full to an uplift assisted downhill facility. FLS should identify the evidence supporting the particular additional health benefit claimed, while also take account of the documented injury profile of downhill MTB.

See attached Appendix 1 Health Analysis or Click here to view:

 **Appendix 1. Health Analysis**

2.1.6. The use of motorised vehicles to carry people with their bikes to the top of the hill runs counter to the Scottish National Outcomes on environmental protection if emitting greenhouse gases and vehicle emissions.

2.1.7. Although there is no indication in the application as to what type of vehicle GNE intends to use, we note that on the **CAT financial spreadsheet under 'costs and sales'** the entry of 'diesel costs: £6,924'. Should diesel vehicles be used, FOP question how GNE can reconcile this not only with their own stated environmental aspirations and Scotland's National Outcomes but also the fact that £357,000 potential funding is 'pending' from an EU organisation called 'Just Transition Fund' which offers help to schemes 'aiming at achieving the EU climate neutrality by 2050'.

2.1.8. The proposal reallocates amenity within a multi-user natural environment. The claimed benefit to a community of interest must be weighed against potential loss of tranquillity, increased vehicle movements, event disturbance and reduced confidence among walkers, horse riders, families and other users.

2.1.9. FOP therefore asks the panel whether there is clear evidence that the vision sufficiently demonstrates the delivery of net public benefit. The CATS test requires the panel to consider the whole proposal and its impacts, not only the benefits to downhill riders.

2.2 Financial benefit analysis

CATS question: Will the project have an overall financial benefit on public-sector costs and/or enhanced provision of public benefit?

2.2.1. GNE forecasts approximately £250,000 of annual tourism impact and approximately £140,000 of direct local economic impact, but FOP notes that the application does not provide an independent economic assessment or a transparent methodology demonstrating how these figures are derived.

2.2.2 Other than three Air B&B's within the village, there is no infrastructure in Monymusk other than a restaurant, which offers high end 'fine dining', that might benefit from any increased tourism.

2.2.3. In **Section 4.2** It is not clear what is meant by the inclusion of 'the Scottish Mountain Biking Strategy positions mountain biking as a key contributor to the national tourism economy, with a target of sustaining over 2.8 million annual MTB visits and a £225m Gross Value Add contribution by 2025'. This needs clarification to see whether it has relevance to this application or whether it is simply an aspirational statement.

2.3 Non-financial benefits

CATS question: What is the impact of non-financial benefits, including economic development, regeneration, public health, social wellbeing, environmental wellbeing, inequalities of outcome and other benefits?

2.3.1. GNE identifies youth development, coaching, volunteering, environmental projects, education and increased participation.

2.3.2. FOP does not dispute that these activities could be beneficial. The difficulty is that a number of the claimed benefits are speculative or represent future intentions rather than secured outcomes. For example, the application suggests that schools *may* use the facility, environmental groups *may* volunteer and biodiversity benefits *could* arise. It does not consistently provide delivery commitments, quantified targets, confirmed partnership arrangements or a timetable against which these benefits could be measured.

2.3.3. As already stated in **2.1.4**. There is no evidence that there are any public health benefits that might stem from this development.

2.3.4. The assessment must also account for negative non-financial effects: noise; vehicle movements; conflict between user groups; potential displacement of walkers and horse riders from routes they currently use; landscape change; ecological disturbance and disturbance during organised events. In particular, a major concern for the locality is the effect that an estimated 20,000 visitors per year will have in terms of traffic through the village and along a highly questionable access route.**2.3.4** Those visiting the hill to enjoy its wildlife will be seriously disadvantaged by the increased activity on the proposed trails. The route of the new downhill trail is now within 200m of the nest of a protected bird.

2.4 Equality

CATS question: What evidence has the organisation provided of taking account of the different needs of the community, and what contribution will the project make to equalities outcomes?

2.4.1. GNE refers to women, young people and people from rural or deprived backgrounds. FOP considers that the application provides much less evidence about disabled users, older people, people with other protected characteristics.

2.4.2. Of great significance is how competing recreational users will be accommodated. There appears to be a lack of recognition with regard to the equality that should be afforded to other users of this area of the forest.

2.4.3. The panel should consider whether increasing the accumulative intensity of a downhill biking facility has unequal effects on people who rely on the forest for quieter forms of recreation. The use of vehicles on the forest track and walking path will impinge greatly on other user's access and safety in the forest. FOP has received concerns that some existing users may avoid routes subject to regular uplift traffic.

2.4.4. A proposal should not be regarded as strongly positive on equality merely because it provides opportunities for one group.

3. VIABILITY

3.1 Leadership

CATS question: Is there a clear plan and leadership in place for achieving the project outcomes?

3.1.1. GNE has identified trustees, operational roles and external advisers, and it has experience in mountain biking. FOP accepts that this provides some evidence of organisational capability.

3.1.2. However, the scale of the proposed undertaking is substantial: construction, a 25-year lease, a visitor facility, event management, biodiversity management, car-park operations and a vehicle uplift business. Such heavy reliance on volunteers when seen against an expensive project with seemingly narrow financial margins and an uncertain revenue stream not only now but for the next 25 years will require careful scrutiny before CAT is granted.

3.1.3. FOP considers that the evidence should be tested against a detailed project programme, defined milestones, responsibilities, contingency arrangements and a clear plan for what happens if the uplift operation or other income streams fail.

3.2 Governance and accountability

CATS question: Are appropriate governance structures and policies in place, and what impact will they have on project viability?

3.2.1. The application identifies operational, forestry, vehicle/HSE, events and biodiversity roles.

It does not, in FOP's view, provide sufficient detail for the panel to assess how conflicts between these functions will be managed, how decisions will be recorded, how health and safety performance will be reported, or how FLS will receive assurance over a 25-year period.

3.2.2. Professional and independent monitoring and verification should be considered rather than reliance on volunteers in view of the uncertainties and risks involved with regard to a development of this scale.

3.3 Use of resources

CATS question: Has the group identified all resources required, and are they sufficient and sustainable over the lifetime of the project?

3.3.1. The capital requirement is forecast at approximately £1.1 million, of which sums of £500,000 and £357,000 are grant funding 'pending' and the balance is still being sought.

3.3.2. We note the heavy reliance on funding from charitable donations, about £200,000 is described as 'potential' and £857,000 is described as 'pending'.

3.3.3. Clarification is required as to the precise definition of 'pending' and 'potential' (see **Capital Investment of the CAT Financial spreadsheet**). For 'pending' does this mean that the grant is dependent on certain conditions being met? Given that £357,000 funding has been earmarked from an EU scheme whose purpose is "aiming at achieving the EU climate-neutrality by 2050" are there environmental conditions that GNE have to establish before receiving the grant? Given the clear environmental basis of this fund, the panel should ensure that the grant would not be affected by the use of diesel vehicles should it be GNE's intention that they are to be used (see diesel costs £6,942 **Costs of Sales, CAT Financial spreadsheet**).

3.3.4. Clarification is needed as to why the estimate for signage is £10,000. (**CAT Financial spreadsheet Capital investment**)

<https://forestryandland.gov.scot/media/qbudwaon/pitfichie-hill-atr-7-uplift-parking-financial-business-plan.xlsx>

3.3.5. The Panel should take into account the various inconsistencies that have come to light in FOP's detailed financial analysis. **See attached Appendix 2 Financial Analysis or click here: [Appendix 2 Financial Analysis](#)**

3.3.6. GNE relies on volunteers, professional advisers, contractors and environmental groups. FOP considers that resources described as expected should not be treated as secured resources. Written evidence should be required for funding identified as pending or expected and any associated conditions should be described.

3.3.7. What financial provision have GNE made if they need to buy land for passing places?

3.3.8. The uplift model specifically includes employed-driver costs and employer overheads. This is material because the viability of the operation depends on staffing, vehicles, insurance, fuel, maintenance and road access. The panel should require a fully costed staffing and vehicle plan before concluding that the proposed resources are sufficient.

3.4 Sustainability

CATS question: Has the group set out evidence of how the project will be funded in the longer term?

FOP considers the long-term financial case insufficiently demonstrated. The financial analysis should be assessed alongside the assumptions and uncertainties identified elsewhere in this submission. The panel should consider whether the financial model remains viable if visitor numbers or uplift occupancy are materially below forecast. FOP's professional financial assessment is attached as a separate document.

Costs and contingencies are inadequately supported. There is no detailed construction cost breakdown, no evident construction contingency, no inflation allowance, no financing costs, no detailed cash flow analysis and limited provision for major maintenance, storm damage and asset replacement.

It is noted that GNE has some reliance on funding through arranging events. We feel it important that, should this be the case, financial arrangements specific to events are known and that certain conditions should be applied. Recent problems during an event has led to potential uncertainty as to where participants of some events and their vehicles, including caravans and camper vans, will stay for the weekend of an event. Have GNE future proof and written contractual arrangements to allow the accommodation of participants and supporters at events?

A 25-year lease requires confidence that the organisation can maintain trails, infrastructure, safety systems and environmental commitments even if commercial assumptions are not achieved.

The attached **Appendix 2. FOP's Financial Analysis** provides evidence for the Panel to assess. [Appendix 2 Financial Analysis](#)

The Panel should assure themselves that both GNE's financial statement and model of operations as well as the professional analysis of a chartered accountant, provided by FOP, are scrutinised by an independent financial expert.

3.5 Performance management

CATS question: How will the group monitor and report achievement of outcomes, use of resources and delivery of outcomes?

3.5.1. FOP has not identified a sufficiently developed framework of measurable key performance indicators in the CAT application.

3.5.2. There should be measurable targets for visitor numbers, parking and traffic, events, complaints, user conflict, incidents, biodiversity outcomes, trail condition, maintenance expenditure, volunteer activity and community engagement.

3.5.3. For a 25-year lease, these should be linked to regular reporting to FLS, with trigger points for corrective action where agreed standards are not met.

4. COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND WIDER PUBLIC BENEFIT

4.1 partnerships & effects on other users.

CATS question: What partnerships are in place and what impact will they have on delivery of intended benefits?

4.1.1 GNE identifies support from the NEAT Project, Opportunity North East, Invest Aberdeenshire, Aberdeenshire Trail Association and other cycling-related organisations, and refers to environmental volunteers and schools.

4.1.2. GNE states at **Section 5.1 p14 of the CAT application** that they are "consulting local business owners and working with the support of landowners on mountain biking projects. We are working with the local environmental volunteers, for example RSPB volunteers to contribute to our biodiversity plan." FOP request that the assessment panel obtain more precise information about partnerships. The GNE supporting bundle includes a personal note from the chairman of a local RSPB volunteer group. FOP does not question the legitimacy of that support. The panel should however distinguish between the views of an individual or local volunteer group representative and formal institutional ecological advice or endorsement from RSPB Scotland.

4.1.3. We note also that GNE's biodiversity plan says its activities are informed by recommendations from RSPB, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Nature Scotland, Butterfly Conservation Scotland and other bodies. **(p10 section 4.2 and p14 section 5.1)** FLS will wish to establish exactly what "recommendations" means in each case. Who was consulted?

In what capacity? What material did they receive? Did they see the complete CAT proposal? Did they see the car park, uplift operation, event arrangements and visitor assumptions? Did they visit the site? FOP have not found evidence of a current generic “FLS/NatureScot open working agreement”.

4.1.4. What evidence has GNE provided to demonstrate the support of local landowners? (p14 section 5.1)

4.1.5. “Gravitate North East members are consulting local business owners” (p14 section 5.1). FOP are not aware of any ‘businesses’ operating from Monymusk. There is little or no infrastructure in the village which might benefit from the presence of a downhill course. We are aware of only one local concern that could gain financially — The Grant Arms which is no longer a hotel but acts as a restaurant specialising in ‘fine dining’ as well as serving coffee and lunch some mornings of the week. Likewise, accommodation providers within the area could gain some customers.

4.1.6. Under Benefits of the proposal in **section 4.2 of the CAT application**, GNE states “The project’s design includes family-friendly spectator areas and inclusive facilities”. Clarification as to the precise meaning of this is required. Where would it be sited? What is its design? FOP wishes to point out that the influx of spectators at events is a problem in itself with regard to noise from the likes of air horns and tannoy, litter, behaviour and potential effects on wildlife especially when events have occurred during the nesting season. Many complaints were received by FLS after a recent ‘downhill events’. The principal direct beneficiaries of the development would be the downhill biking fraternity and supporters. The loss of benefit for locals and those who visit the area for walking, horse riding and even mountain biking and also loss of access and amenity should all be factors taken into account in the assessment process.

4.1.7. Statements in the **Planning Statement Sections 4.6, 4.10, and 5.14** suggest that access will be maintained and that there will be ‘enhanced recreational value of the forest for a wide range of users’. Precisely how will this be achieved? To get up Pitfichie Hill with a trailer will require a 4x4 vehicle which will limit uplift to approximately 7 people. GNE state vehicles will only travel at 10mph, which means about a 30minute round trip, so the first bikes will be back at the start before the 4x4. In the case that the vehicles will stop to allow other users of the forest to safely pass, times longer than half an hour need to be factored in lest such delays impact profitability. To work such a system would require that motorised vehicles will operate continuously along routes shared by other forest users. GNE should explain to the Panel how this is compatible with enhanced recreational value for others. Access as well as amenity for others would be affected.

4.1.8. FOP considers that the panel should distinguish between organisations or individuals supporting mountain biking generally and partners with a formal commitment to deliver this particular project.

4.1.9. The application contains a number of statements about future collaboration with schools, environmental groups and other user groups. FOP asks that these are treated as proposed partnerships unless written commitments or agreements are supplied.

4.2 Local community support

Please also see the two attached documents: [Survey Analysis](#) and [Appendices to survey analysis](#)

CATS question: What evidence has been provided of local community support and what impact will it have on delivery of intended outcomes?

4.2.1. GNE were unable to answer many questions at the two open sessions held in the village hall. In order to better understand GNE's plans, FOP submitted a list of 41 questions to a member of GNE who returned the paper a week later with the questions unanswered. (P15 second para CAT application doc)

4.2.2. P15 Section 5 'Level and nature of support'. GNE posted on the 'What's on in Monymusk' Facebook page a request for people to support the proposed development. This is a private closed Facebook page visible to 2,300 members. This was a Facebook post on August 20th 2025. It showed that of 84 respondents 45% were strongly positive, 30% neutral and 25% strongly negative.

4.2.3. The panel will be aware that social media surveys tend towards a self-selection/sampling bias due to their algorithmic ability to direct traffic to interest groups. Many in Monymusk do not use social media and there are members of the 'What's on in Monymusk' Facebook page who live in far distant locations.

4.2.4. FOP's paper based, letterbox delivered survey done in February 2026, to households within a three mile radius of the village, showed 217 respondents against the development and 25 in favour. FOP considers these results to be significant evidence of local opposition.

4.2.5. The FLS CAT scoring template expressly states: "that a proposal may receive a negative ranking where there is evidence of community opposition."

4.2.6. p15 section 5 CAT Level and nature of support: "as the planning process proceeds we will publish our detailed plans to the public for feedback and have a structured consultation with other user groups eg. walkers, horse riders and environmental groups". What evidence is there that this has been done or is going to be done?

4.2.7. FOP therefore asks the panel to consider not merely whether consultation took place, but whether the proposal has obtained sufficient local support to underpin a 25-year transfer or whether there is significant local opposition.

4.3 Wider public support

CATS question: What will be the impact on wider public strategies and plans and on communities, businesses or individuals outside the community represented by the applicant?

4.3.1. GNE represents a community of mountain bikers in Aberdeenshire. That is a legitimate community of interest, but the asset is also used by a wider community of place and a community of interest who are, in the main, walkers.

4.3.2. FOP has received concerns from horse riders and other forest users about the safety and amenity implications of motorised uplift vehicles. FOP has received concerns that walkers, families, dog walkers and other existing users may avoid routes if regular vehicle uplift operations are introduced.

4.3.3. Below is the petition showing 31 signatories attending a riding 'Enduro' event at Monymusk on 02/08/26 opposing GNE's development; this being further evidence that 'the proposal will have a negative effect on the wider community by disrupting or displacing existing local community activities.'

 Horse riding petition completed forms.docx

4.3.4. The panel should therefore assess wider public benefit net of displacement: a benefit to one user group should not automatically be treated as a net public benefit if it materially reduces the enjoyment or accessibility of the same public asset for other groups.

5. MANAGEMENT OF SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL FORESTS AND LAND

5.1 Contribution to management of Scotland's National Forests and Land

CATS question: What impact will the project have on management of the national forests and land and on FLS statutory or contractual obligations and strategic objectives?

This is a working National Forest Estate and the CAT must coexist with forestry operations over a long period.

5.1.1. Questions concerning felling, timber extraction, forestry roads, machinery, closures, windblow, wildfire, tree safety, deer management, drainage, maintenance and future Land Management Plans are all directly relevant to whether the proposal is operationally

sustainable. What restrictions and costs does this CAT place upon forestry? FOP considers that FLS should be satisfied that these activities will not compromise its ability to manage the wider forest, maintain access for other users, undertake forestry operations or meet its environmental and public-access responsibilities.

5.2.2. FOP also asks that the limits of GNE's management authority are clearly defined. GNE would manage the leased/corridor areas, but would not control all of Pittfichie Hill and Cairn William. The precise area of management and of rental need clarification given the apparent disparities referred to earlier.

5.2.3. The wording in the CAT application about enabling further trail development should be clarified and the lease should not create an open-ended mechanism for incremental expansion.

5.2 Sustainable development

Environmental and biodiversity issues

CATS question: Will the proposals have a positive or negative environmental impact and contribute to sustainable development, including compliance with sustainable forest management principles?

5.2.1. Pittfichie Hill falls within the Bennachie Special Landscape Area.

We take into account GNE's Biodiversity Plan appended to their application as well as the Preliminary Ecological Assessment, in their planning application to Aberdeenshire Council.

5.2.2. Preliminary Ecological Assessment (PEA): This document, which is relevant to GNE's environmental statements, does not appear in the CAT application but can be viewed on the Aberdeenshire Planning application site:

https://upa.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/online-applications/files/7F5DC4D3846E3A77756B944D6E3814C6/pdf/APP_2026_1295-PRELIMINARY_ECOLOGICAL_APPRAISAL-12062992.pdf

5.2.3. FOP notes that the PEA is dated February 2026, whereas the field survey was carried out on 20 January 2026. At that time, conditions were recorded as temperature 7°C, light showers, 100% cloud cover and snow remaining at higher levels. These conditions should be taken into account if the report is to be relied upon as the ecological baseline for the development. The absence of a species from biological records cannot be taken to demonstrate actual absence where there has been only one site visit in midwinter. Many species are absent or less readily observed during January in Aberdeenshire. In **section 2.3.2 of the PEA**, the authors themselves identify limitations arising from the timing and conditions of the survey.

5.2.4. An assessment of flora can not be seen to be reliable if made in January in Scotland.

5.2.5. The authors have not taken into account the recent Aberdeen University Phd study on pine martens in the woods of Bennachie and Pitfichie in which numbers of identifiable individual pine martens were counted using DNA analysis. Most residents around the forest have seen pine martens. **(3.4.4 of the PEA)**

5.2.6. Hedgehogs have been seen in areas immediately surrounding the forest (FOP's personal record). **(3.4.6 of PEA)**

5.2.7. Reptiles — NatureScot's published advice says reptiles hibernate from October to March and that surveys should be undertaken between April and September. It also says a reptile survey should be undertaken where reptiles *could* occur within or close to a development site. The PEA identifies areas that are highly suitable for reptiles. Why is there no proper seasonal reptile survey? **(3.4.10 of PEA)**

5.2.8. Birds — no mention is made of Schedule 1 species other than Osprey. The assessment relies heavily on NESBREC. Within the immediate area there is at least one nesting Schedule1 raptor and other Schedule1 species frequent the area. We note that the biodiversity plan makes no reference to this. In view of the fact that there is no mapped precision to the routing of GNE's proposed new trails and also, because FLS and GNE have no control over where unofficial trails may be built, liaison with the competent bodies involved in ornithology would be appropriate. Increased visitor numbers, year-round activity and organised events are likely to reduce habitat quality for sensitive wildlife particularly protected birds. It should be noted that this year downhill biking events attracted over 200 people and took place during the nesting season. Many complaints were made about the noise and behaviour. Five organised competitions each year will create concentrated periods of noise, traffic and disturbance beyond normal recreational use. The proposal does not adequately assess impact on protected species whose breeding success can be affected by repeated disturbance. How are GNE and FLS to manage the protection of a protected species that may move into this area of management? Should this happen, what contingency plans have been made? How would such an event affect the viability of the project?

5.2.9. P 9 CAT application section 4.2 GNE states:"there are five mountain biking events planned in 2026." Two of these events were in April and May 2026. Nesting season for birds is considered to be from 1st March to August 31st. What contractual constraints should be in place to prevent events and the large number of people involved disrupting nesting birds?

5.2.10 What constraint should there be to prevent GNE subcontracting other companies to organise events throughout the year and especially during the bird nesting season?

5.2.11. Given the concern that intensified recreational use, particularly during events, could disturb nesting birds, what further assessments will be undertaken to identify breeding birds? We note the statement in **section 5.1** that, if works are undertaken during the bird-nesting season (March to August inclusive), a nesting-bird check should be undertaken by an ecologist no more than 48 hours before works commence. Disturbance, however, will arise not only during construction but also during operation of the proposed centre. FOP therefore considers that further assessment should be undertaken irrespective of whether 'works' take place during the nesting season. FOP also questions the PEA conclusion that no further survey work is recommended other than pre-works checks.

5.2.12. The ecological and environmental assessment appears limited and was undertaken at a time of year that may not provide an appropriate baseline for all species. Absence from the survey record is not the same as evidence of absence.

The Biodiversity Plan identifies a range of habitats and proposes actions including removal of non-native regeneration, habitat management, wet areas, bird and bat boxes, woodland structural diversity and heathland management.

5.2.13. Whilst all the above is desirable, the issue is whether such acts within the narrow corridor (measuring 15.5ha) that GNE hope to manage can deliver a net environmental benefit when seen against the overall size of Pitfichie Hill, Cairn William and Green Hill (2,500ha). What methodology or metric has FLS used to establish that the proposed biodiversity measures constitute a net additional environmental benefit after accounting for the development's own impacts and mitigation requirements. GNE's claims are very questionable when much of FLS new planting on the East side of the hill is to be birch, Scots pine and Norway spruce (conversation with FLS manager 10/03/26 on site).

5.2.14. The Biodiversity Plan records that the ecological assessment relied on a desk study for a number of species and that records were incomplete. It also identifies links to upland heathland, native pine woodland, dry-stone walls and areas associated with PAWS and semi-natural woodland. Trails close to Plantations of Ancient Woodland Species increase the risk of erosion, root damage, invasive species and long-term degradation.

5.2.15. FOP asks how GNE intends to take the proximity of Paradise Wood SSSI into account particularly in relation to increased visitor numbers.

5.2.16. We note a reference to providing wetland areas and the building of pools to encourage invertebrate and insect life (**P1 of CAT doc and 3.6 on planning statement**) but wonder where precisely these are to be located especially as the act of building a downhill course exacerbates water run-off from hillsides.

5.2.17. GNE's Biodiversity Plan says final trail alignment will be selected later within a broad corridor to avoid environmentally sensitive locations, including perennial nest sites and groundwater seeps, and that a Construction Method Statement will follow. What evidence allows FLS presently to attribute the claimed environmental benefit and to assess the environmental effect where the final alignment and elements of mitigation remain deferred?

5.2.18. FOP is particularly concerned about the upper trail/push-up section across open heathland and shallow organic soils, the potential effects of trails near PAWS and semi-natural woodland, drainage and erosion, and disturbance to protected or sensitive species. The act of building an 'upper climb trail' through previously untouched moorland and without a more detailed assessment, seems to be an omission and is not compatible with the Special Landscape Area. What peat/soil studies have been done? Having walked over the area of the proposed course of the push-up track, we are unaware of 'bracken and non native species'. All heather in the area is old. There are no 'open worn granite areas' because the track, as shown on the map below, has never existed before (**Biodiversity Plan Trail Section E**). On page 7 of the planning statement under the heading Upper Climb Trail, it states 'the new route will utilise an existing informal well established mountain bike trail that meanders up the hill providing access to the start of DH1'. It is not clear from the

description but we think that GNE are referring to a track outlined in the map below. This needs clarification. There is no informal, well established trail there. There is, however, an existing straight walking path from the bealach to the top of the hill albeit now much eroded by mountain biking; this being the route that bikers now pedal up to the top of the hill.

Map 7. Showing the siting of the upper trail which will cut through open heather moorland. (ringed in white)



5.2.19. Car parking and toileting facilities appear to be excluded from the landscape and biodiversity enhancement on the map. We note also looking at the site map the car park and toilets will be left unscreened when viewed from the road. Even if trees are planted, it will take many years for growth to effectively screen the area. As such, the car park and toileting facilities will detract from the natural beauty of the area. The development would further urbanise a Special Landscape Area with its engineered trails, signage, parking and visitor facilities. Additional trails will further fragment woodland habitats rather than restore ecological connectivity.

5.2.20. Our research (vis Glentress) and our personal observations raise a new issue — that of increasing occurrences of night time biking with head torches. Is GNE aware of this as a problem? Has head torch activity and nocturnal wildlife disturbance been assessed? What enforceable operating conditions would apply?

5.2.21. FOP considers that the ecological baseline, protected-species assessment and cumulative impacts of year-round riding, five organised events, infrastructure and uplift vehicles (especially if diesels) require robust consideration before any claim of net biodiversity gain can be accepted.

5.2.22. The proposed biodiversity measures are also predominantly future management commitments. For a 25-year lease, the environmental obligations should be precise, mapped, measurable, funded and enforceable, with monitoring and remedial mechanisms rather than broad aspirations.

6. TRAFFIC, PARKING, ACCESS AND RECREATIONAL CONFLICT — CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

TRAFFIC AND ACCESS

6.1. Although traffic and recreational conflict do not appear as separate numbered headings in the scoring template, they affect several of its criteria and should be considered across utilisation, benefits, wider public benefit and management of the national forest estate. GNE forecasts up to 20,000 visitors per year and proposes a 76-space car park. Its access strategy relies on the existing road network and anticipates passing-place improvements.

6.2. GNE's application acknowledges uncertainty in visitor numbers. What is the evidence and methodology as to how GNE chose the figure of 20,000? Even if 20,000 is a realistic estimate, it will have a significant impact with regard to traffic, the access route and the intensity of disturbance in the forest. There are no similar downhill biking sites with uplift vehicles with which comparisons can be made. However there are downhill trails at Tarland which is 31 miles from Aberdeen, the main population centre. Pittfichie is 21 miles from Aberdeen. Both Tarland and Pittfichie have similar lengths of cycling tracks ~ 13 miles. A big difference is that Tarland trails have no uplift vehicles. Measured numbers of visitors to Tarland trails are in the region of 40,000 a year.



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6.3. Issues with regard to traffic and the road access route will fall under the scrutiny of Aberdeenshire Roads Department. Nevertheless, on a separate document, we have done our own research **see attachment 'Traffic Analysis'**.

Attached document Traffic Analysis: Traffic Analysis.

6.4. FOP are aware that the council roads department will make their own assessment of the traffic flow coming through the village. However, FOP feel it important that the panel is fully

aware of the layout of the village which is designed around the village square and is of historical importance. Traffic from the 'main' road (B993) will have to come through the village square itself to access the proposed downhill centre. (See map on Traffic Analysis appendix). FOP feel that loss of amenity, disruption, noise and the effect on the 'Sense of Place' of the village are all material points to consider in the assessment process because one of the main concerns coming from the survey of the community was the effects of increased traffic through the village square and along the single track access road. Has GNE taken sufficient consideration of both the villagers' concerns and the effect that increased traffic will have on the village itself?



Views of the village showing the village square and the road along which most of the traffic will travel en route to the proposed downhill centre.

6.5. Historic Environment Scotland states “Historical Level of interest: Outstanding. The historical evidence available for the designed landscape is remarkable and gives this site outstanding historical value.” Monymusk’s unique architecture is even used visually and promotionally at Aberdeen Airport.

The proposed uplift operation is of particular concern. See also Section 1 under Utilisation at the start of this document and showing the map of Pittfichie Hill.

6.6. The CAT application requests a non-exclusive ancillary right to use ‘the forest road’ for access and mountain-bike uplift vehicles. The precise uplift route appears to be missing from the application and is not shown clearly on the accompanying documents. The complete uplift vehicle route should be mapped from its starting point to its destination. This is material to the assessment of safety, access and environmental effects.

6.7. As has been mentioned earlier (**1.9 2.1.7 and 3.3.3**) uncertainty remains about the type of vehicles to be used. If they are fossil fuelled, not only are there environmental implications but also their mere presence with smell and noise on a track used by pedestrians and horse riders should be acknowledged as significant.

6.7. With regard to motorised vehicles on forest roads, FOP’s concern is that repeated motorised vehicle movements on routes shared by walkers and horse riders would materially alter the character and safety of the forest thereby reducing access as well as causing greatly increased erosion and sediment runoff.

6.7. FOP strongly opposes the use of a walking path being used as a route for vehicles.

6.8. Operating frequency, speed controls, passing arrangements and conflict-management measures should be identified and assessed before the CAT is determined. We are aware of conflicting information about speed. GNE’s financial assumptions use 16km/h or 10mph, whereas the Site Operation Plan says that vehicles will be limited to 15mph. Which assumption is correct because speed affects the journey frequency, rider throughput, financial assumptions, road use and interaction with other users? Whichever estimates are used, for the project to be financially viable, with such heavy reliance on income generated from the uplift system, the transport system would have to operate continually during its agreed operating hours.

PARKING AND PRIVATE WATER SUPPLIES

6.9. Reference has been made earlier in this document to issues with parking. These are additional questions relevant to the design, viability, sustainability and effect on the local environment and community.

6.19. In **4.4 of the CAT** application GNE states: “Gravitate Northeast has investigated five locations for a car park and developed an operations plan that addresses concerns. The proposed location has been selected, primarily, because it is close to the trails in the forest..... furthermore, the proposed site provides the best users experience, avoids surface water and drinking water hazards, minimises landscape impact because it is within the forest and is more suitable for multi-use.” What evidence has FLS received which

enables the Evaluation Panel to verify the applicant's conclusion that the selected location of the whole complex, parking and trails, avoids surface-water and drinking water hazards? The mapping of water supplies held on the FLS database is incomplete and inaccurate. See correspondence from FLS dated 27/04/26. The email below was in response to FOP noticing inaccuracies and omissions in FLS mapping of Private Water Supplies and the lack of cognisance of Protected Drinking Water Catchment Areas. We have already contacted a few neighbours but there are many that we have not contacted.

“The Land Management Plan for Pitfichie and Corrennie operates on a 10-year review cycle and is scheduled for revision next year. As part of this process, the FLS Planner will consult with all immediate neighbours and properties believed to be on a private water supply. If you're in contact with your neighbours and they wish to confirm the location & details of their supply with FLS in advance of the plan review, please encourage them to contact us at this email address. They should provide a grid reference and brief description of the supply type (e.g. borehole, well, spring), and we can update our mapping database Best regards, | **Forest Planner**
Forestry and Land Scotland, East Region.”

6.20. The Panel will be aware of SEPA's document **Guidance on Assessing the Impacts of Developments on Groundwater Abstractions:**

“Developers are responsible for obtaining the relevant information required to support the impact assessment and for designing and undertaking the site works in accordance with the relevant regulations and published guidance. SEPA expect the assessments to be undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced specialists.

<https://www.sepa.org.uk/media/mfzpnjwb/guidance-on-assessing-the-impacts-of-developments-on-groundwater-abstractions.docx>

6.22. Have GNE made a full assessment in line with the regulations within this document and the fact that one or more private water supplies are in close proximity to the development? Has that assessment been made by a suitably qualified and experienced specialist? Has that expert accurately identified not just the water sources but the catchment areas? FOP consider that further assessment should take place to ensure that not only track building but the use of an already eroded path with a large amount of sediment run-off and to be used by vehicles will not affect water supplies.

6.21. What measures are GNE going to take with regard to pollution from run off? How are GNE going to ensure the safety of the nearby private water supply?

6.23. What methodology has GNE used when considering the design of a car park with 76 vehicle bays? (note that The CAT application states at **section 3.8** that the car park will have space for 76 cars, whereas the Location and Site Description map gives a figure of 75). FLS should satisfy itself that the proposed area is adequate, given the frequent use of campervans by bikers, the turning requirements of larger vehicles, the need to load and unload bicycles alongside cars, and the possibility of trailers carrying multiple bicycles and vehicles carrying horses.

6.24. FOP is particularly concerned that the proposed car park and toileting facilities would be visible from not only the road but also from Bennachie and other high spots along the range. Unlike the carpark at Essons at Bennachie, no tree barriers are planned within the parking area to hide the sight of a carpark. Even if trees were to be planted around the perimeter of the car park, it will be many years before they act as an effective screen. The upper climb or push-up trail is also proposed across open heathland and shallow organic soils. How do the above facts fit with the principles outlined in Aberdeenshire's Special Landscape Plan?

6.25. How are GNE going to prevent off-site parking in particular with regard to overnight parking of campervans? Has GNE considered potential problems when the car park is full and visitors want to gain access to the forest? How exactly do GNE propose to prevent camping on site?

6.26. FOP notes that under **section 6.5 of the Planning Statement** GNE says that the operational plan should identify how overnight parking and major events will be managed, including tannoy use, noise pollution and overspill parking. Although the application states that an operations plan has been prepared and submitted, FOP has been unable to find clear provisions addressing noise reduction, the use of tannoys or overnight parking. FOP asks FLS to establish what enforceable restrictions will apply to camping, overnight vehicle use, tannoy and other amplified sound during the proposed 25 year term?

6.27. At the date upon which FLS is assessing the CAT, is the additional land on which GNE's high demand/event operation depends, actually identified and secured, and upon what terms and for what duration?

6.28. Field on grass parking is only suitable for occasional one day or weekend overflow parking and even then in a day can turn into a muddy quagmire. It is the event organisers responsibility to keep the adjoining highway/road/lane clean for safety reasons. This should be factored into costs as an expense that GNE may have to carry when organising events.

6.29. Information from Glentress indicates that there can be an overlap between morning riders leaving and late-morning or early-afternoon riders arriving. Riders may also stay longer when uplift facilities are available, because they can avoid the physical effort of climbing to the top of the runs and may wish to maximise the value of their uplift fees. This may have implications for parking capacity.

6.30. The act of charging for parking will encourage those who have traditionally and legally parked at the entrance to the forest to park off-site. In **section 4.1 of the CAT** application GNE state that visitors currently park in passing places. In fact the main problem is more of parking on the verges. It does occur at the neighbouring FLS Donview car park where the act of charging has caused parking on both passing places and roadside verges in order to avoid paying for parking.

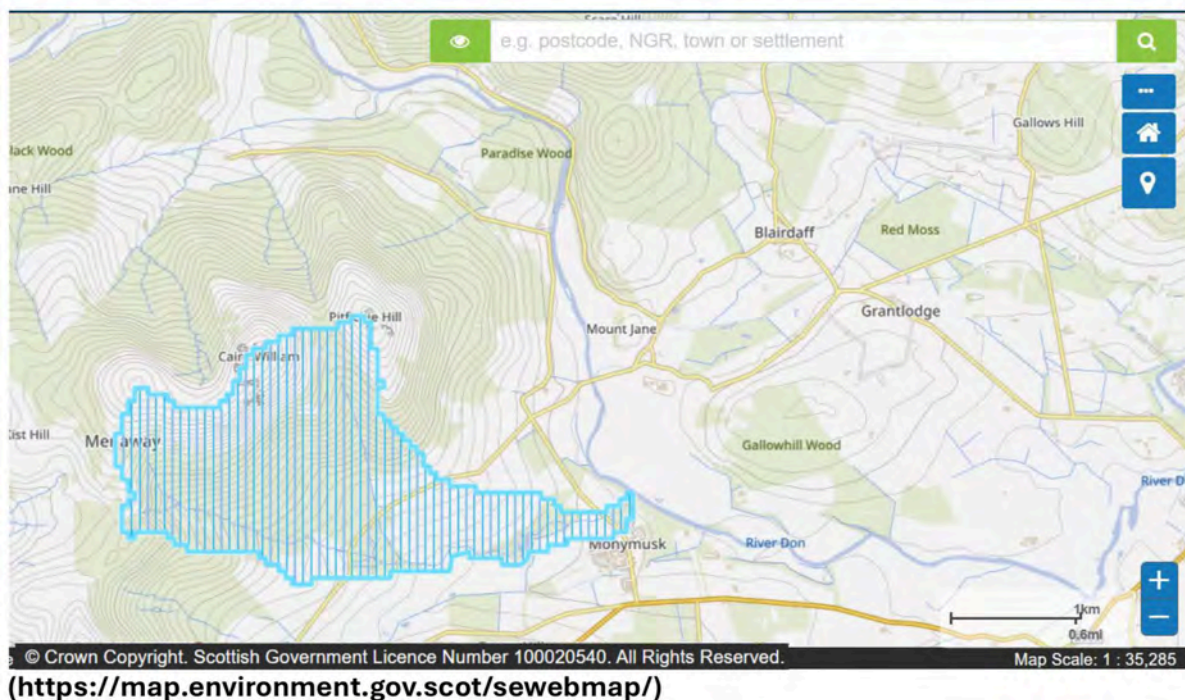
6.31. How will GNE justify parking fees for those who have for many years parked free, legally and responsibly and used the forest for reasons other than downhill biking? Those, who have no association with downhill biking, would be expected to help fund a business of a niche sport through parking charges. As occurs elsewhere, there is a high likelihood that

some visitors will opt to park on verges in order to avoid parking fees. How are GNE going to manage this?

6.32. How are users of the composting toilets going to wash their hands?

6.33 Trail building, changes in surface drainage, repeated vehicle movements all have potential to affect drinking water whose sources are taken from many points on the hill. However, the Protected Drinking Water Area (PDWA)— see below— shows that the intended main uplift track is within this area and as such will be vulnerable to vehicle pollution and erosion. This PDWA serves many houses in and around Monymusk.

Map 8 Protected Drinking Water area.



6.34. FOP also asks that event-day impacts are assessed realistically, including noise, traffic, stewarding, overspill parking, litter, visitor behaviour and disturbance to wildlife particularly during the nesting season.

6.35. The fact that a single event can be managed without an observed traffic failure does not establish that regular operation over 25 years will have no cumulative effect.

7. CONCLUSION

On the evidence presently available, FOP considers that the proposal has not demonstrated sufficient additional public benefit, financial robustness, community support, environmental protection or long-term accountability to justify the requested 25-year lease. There appear to be inconsistencies in GNE's financial statements

Recurrent throughout the document is the aspirational nature of many of GNE's claims and the lack of evidence that they can be achieved and sustained over 25 years.

The FLS scoring template expressly allows negative rankings where there is evidence of community opposition, where governance or resources are insufficient to sustain a project, where a project may negatively affect the wider community, or where it may impede FLS's ability to meet its duties and strategic objectives.

FOP considers that those provisions are directly relevant to this application.

The key point is that a number of criteria appear to fall within the template's low, negative-impact or potentially negative categories.

FOP therefore asks FLS **not to approve the Community Asset Transfer in its present form.**

Please acknowledge receipt of these documents and confirm that they will be placed in full before the CATS Evaluation Panel.

Health Economics Perspective

Downhill Mountain Biking

The health benefits of cycling are clear. Cycling is associated with a lower risk of mortality from any cause. It is associated with a reduction in the incidence of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes as well as promoting positive mental health and well-being. Replacing car journeys with cycling can lead to reductions in air pollution emissions and lower pollutant exposure to the general population. Furthermore, the greater the distance one cycles on a regular basis, the greater the reduction in health risk.

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10546027/#B19>

The evidence also indicates that the benefits of cycling are broadly similar to other forms of physical activity ie. There is no evidence to suggest that cycling itself is more advantageous than other equivalent forms of exercise. While physical activity is widely recognised as beneficial, the specific case of Downhill mountain biking is fundamentally different from general exercise as the focus is on technical skill and speed rather than sustained cardiovascular activity. Participants do short-duration, high-intensity runs.

Recent research (see article 2 below Neil et al. 2026) records cognitive neurological damage in competitive downhill mountain bikers similar to that which occurs in heading footballs.

Downhill biking has a documented injury profile which should form part of any balanced assessment of claimed public-health benefit.

The perceived benefit of a walk in the open air will be compromised if diesel vehicles are used with associated PM2 emissions.

Peer-reviewed research consistently finds high injury rates:

1. Becker et al. (2013, The American Journal of Sports Medicine) Found downhill mountain biking had significantly higher injury rates than cross-country cycling.https://web.archive.org/web/20170813050048id_/http://www.rcsi.ie/files/facultyofsports/exercise/20130508040825_Becker_BJSM_2013_Mountain%20Bike.pdf
2. Association between downhill mountain bike racing and neurophysiological indices of sensory, attentional and cognitive processing in youth athletes. (July 2026)
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC13396929/>
3. British Journal of Sports Medicine studies Identify mountain biking (especially downhill) as having higher injury incidence than many mainstream sports
<https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/47/7/458>
4. BMJ article on downhill mountain biking injuries (2023)
<https://bmjopensem.bmj.com/content/10/4/e002270> In a world class competition event:: 10.4% of the 230 cyclists sustained at least one injury. The overall injury incidence rate was 3.3 (95% CI 3.1 to 3.5) per 100 rides. The incidence rates were higher in the training 4.3 (95% CI 4.0 to 4.6)/100 rides than in the racing 2.2 (95% CI 2.1 to 2.3)/100 rides. GNE describes their hopes of building a 'world class' downhill course.

Injuries may involve Air Ambulance transport, A and E attendance, hospitalisation, rehabilitation and physio. Cost of air ambulance from the Aberdeen base is £7500/mission and from the Perth base £5000/mission. (source: written response from SCAA 6/5/26). Have GNE factored in the need to liaise with emergency services and in particular where an air ambulance might safely land?

Conclusion

The general public health benefits attributed to cycling should not automatically be attributed in full to an uplift-assisted downhill facility. FLS should identify the evidence supporting the particular additional health benefit claimed while also taking account of the documented injury profile of downhill MTB.

Any claimed public health benefit should be treated with caution unless supported by robust evidence demonstrating a genuine net positive outcome.

However, it should be noted that Pitfichie forest already has 20 kilometres of mountain biking trails which gives adequate provision for exercise by cycling.

References: Becker J et al. (2013). *Injury epidemiology of mountain biking*. American Journal of Sports Medicine

Nelson NG, McKenzie LB (2011). *Mountain biking injuries*. Wilderness & Environmental Medicine

British Journal of Sports Medicine – various injury surveillance studies

NICE guidelines on physical activity and public health (UK)

Appendix 2

Analysis of GNE's finances.

The only other comparable site in Scotland is the much larger Glentress Site run by Forestry Land Scotland.

As per their website, charges are:

- Adrenaline Uplift Shuttle £40 per person
- Vehicle Parking Up to 1 hour £3, Up to 3 hours £4, All day £6

Gravitate North East Pitfichie Hill Financial Projections

Build costs for the trail and parking along with various sundry items is estimated at £1,050,000 over a 3 to 4 month construction phase.

Will this build be a turn-key contract with someone like Robertsons, who built the Glentress trails, or individual contractors?

Has Gravitate North East the project management capabilities to oversee a project of this size? There does not appear to be any provision for this type of project manager cost within the plan for the considerable legal and planning costs associated with the commencement of such a project.

If a company like Robertsons were to be used would they require guarantees that there are funds to complete the project?

Will there be loans or a guarantee from someone like FLS to enable the project to be completed?

Having prepared a rough monthly cash flow for 2027, this shows an estimated maximum funding requirement of £1.185m before the site is operational. With working capital requirements the minimum funds required to get the site operational would be circa £1.2m.

It would appear Gravitate hopes to raise a maximum of £1.042m with the main pending award £0.5m from Cycling Facilities Fund. There appears to be no funding actually allocated or approved for the project to date. Gravitate have £21k in cash reserves as at November 2025 and have raised £6.5k over the last 3 years.

Looking at the projections there are a number of limitations:

- This is only an income and expenditure summary without consideration for inflation and although it is stated net of VAT this does not show the significant cashflow requirements that exist due to the 20% VAT which would be front loaded before claims were submitted to be reclaimed.
- No actual Cashflow appears anywhere nor a projected Profit and Loss Account or Balance Sheets.
- There are significant accountancy principals which need to be included to give an accurate Profit and Loss such as depreciation, accruals and prepayments.
- A Balance Sheet gives a snap shot of the business at a date which can provide more insights into the viability of a business with assets and liabilities shown together.

The assumptions are very general as everything is stated as net of VAT.

On the income assumptions the following observation are relevant:

Car Park Tickets

The first year's income has been based on 15,000 cars equating to 30,000 visitors per year, the second and third year income has been based on 12,500 cars equating to 25,000 visitors per year, dropping to 20,500 visitors from year four onwards. This is in direct contradiction to both the funding narrative and traffic numbers which states 10,000 cars.

GNF's Appendix 1 does show under car park assumptions the number starting at 30,000 visitors but does not offer any reason why this level would be achieved.

There seems to be inconsistency in the different areas of the proposal.

There is also a calculation error in the income from the car park as those using the uplift do not pay for parking. The cashflow shows 3,600 using uplift service, but the adjustment for this within car park charges is 3,400. This would reduce income by £525.

Parking fees are VATable so the daily charge to the public would be £4.20.

Uplift ticket sales

The sales have been based on being open 50 weeks, but within appendix 1 they state a loss of 5 weeks due to bad weather. (in costs they use 45 weeks to base calculations) If the sales for uplift were based on 45 weeks this would reduce income by £12,600.

They estimate £35 per ticket but adding VAT the charge is £42 when Glentress charges £40. The funding section states the cost is "based on UK-wide rates discounted for the lower visitor numbers and smaller scale of the facility at Pitfichie Hill"

If they match Glentress price at £40 (including VAT) this would reduce net turnover by £6,000 a year.

On the expenditure assumptions the following observations are relevant

Cost of Sales

Website Maintenance and online payments has been included at £1,500 per year. This would appear to be considerably less than the current market levels

Website maintenance = £1,500

Commercial Internet access re online payment system = £1,500

Online payments normally 1% of ticket sales = $1\% \times £156,450 = £1564.50$

Resulting in additional costs of £3,064.50

Diesel Costs have been included at a price of £1.44 (£1.73 including VAT) which is considerably less than the current price of £1.54 (£1.85 including VAT) which over the 45 weeks used to calculate costs would result in additional costs of £483

MOT & TAX No comment

Event Support No comment

Staffing Volunteer crew Training No Comment

Driver Costs

I would question if you are going to get experienced drivers for a cost of £14 an hour (national minimum wage £12.71) but that is not the major issue in this area. Do they intend to use zero hour contracts? They have based costs on 45 weeks but full time staff are entitled to be paid for holidays and days cancelled due to site being closed. So in order to comply with statutory legislation I would have expected this to be based on 52 weeks. This would incur an additional cost of £6,272.

Employer's Costs

Within appendix 1 they state that employer costs (misc.) will be included at 40% However the cashflow calculation is based on 30% if this had been correctly included an additional cost of £4,032 would be incurred. If the cost was for 52 weeks as detailed above this would incur a further cost of £2,508.80

Building Costs and Marketing No comments

Finance and Admin. Accountancy

If they have 2 employees payroll costs and quarterly vat returns as well as an audit, this would be more like £8000. Incurring additional cost of £7,000

Public Liability Insurance and Vehicle Insurance No Comment

FLS Rent No comment

Other Costs – Decommissioning and Storm Reserve

The construction costs are £1,050,000 that is going to cause a significant amount of change to the natural landscape which already exists on the hillside. The value of £15,000 over 3 years does not seem to be a figure that would remove and restore the hillside to its previous habituate.

In summary

The income and expenditure summary sheet shows a “net profit” of £6,225

The items detailed above would adjust this as follows:

Calculation error income reduction	£ 525
Reduce Uplift to 45 weeks income reduction	£12,600
Price match to Glentress income reduction	£ 6,000
Increase website and online payments increase expense	£ 3,064.50
Diesel Costs to reflect market rates increase expenses	£ 483
Staffing costs to 52 weeks salary increase expense	£ 6,272
Employers cost to 40% as per narrative increase expense	£ 4,032
Employers cost on 52 weeks salary cost increase expense	£ 2,508.80
Finance and admin realistic cost increase expense	£ 7,000
Total	£42,485.30

Which would result in a deficit of £36,260.30

These adjustments would continue over the period of the projections resulting in a deficit every year. Where would extra funding come from?

SURVEY ANALYSIS.

To find out residents' opinion on the GNE proposal to build a Downhill Biking Centre and additional infrastructure, surveys were made by the **Friends of Pitfichie (FOP)** and by **GNE**.

FOP's survey and that done by GNE, are completely different in terms of methodology, the means of distribution/collection of results, the geographical spread of those targeted by the survey, promotional bias and ability to acquire reasons for supporting or opposing the development.

Summary of surveys

Surveys conducted and data analysis					
Where and when surveyed	Number surveyed	Number of responses	Number against	Number undecided	Number in favour
FOP survey 2025	100	57	45	-	12
FOP survey 02/2026	425	247	217	5	25
GNE Facebook survey 2025	2300 FB members	84	21	25	38

The **GNE** survey, conducted in August 2025, prior to the Community Council meeting in the village hall, was done via a post on the closed private Facebook Page 'What's on in Monymusk' which has about 2300 members who have reasons for wanting to keep in touch with Monymusk events/news.

The GNE questions were not well defined. For example: 'are you resident?' without defining where that residence might be.

GNE states (page 14 last paragraph) "Gravitate Northeast has engaged with those outside the mountain bikers community through the local Cluny, Midmar and Monymusk community Council."

Some of the respondents had postcodes of Old Meldrum, Insch and Oyne (about 12 miles distant from Monymusk).

The GNE Facebook survey showed:

- The survey went out to 2,300 members on 20/08/25 on 'What's on in Monymusk' Facebook group.
- 84 responders of which
- 65 had a stated postcode AB517 and the remaining 19 were classified as 'local' but lived well outside the Monymusk environs even as far away as Inverness.
- Only 12/65 thought Uplift necessary
- of the 84 respondents: 38 FOR, 25 UNDECIDED, 21 AGAINST

FOP did two surveys. The first one was several days before the initial CC meeting (August 27th 2025) at which GNE presented their plans for a downhill mountain biking centre to the Community Council. Very few people were aware of the forthcoming meeting; so part of the function of the survey was to tell people about the meeting. There was very little time in which to organise it so a 'sample' survey was delivered to 100 households in the village itself. This included an information sheet detailing GNE's own publicised outline plans along with a survey sheet. Completed survey sheets were delivered to a metal box outside the local shop or via email. The large range of comments were assessed. The outcome was that of the **100** survey sheets, **57** were returned of which **12 For** and **45 Against** the development.

A second survey was done by **FOP** just prior to GNE information day on 28 February 2026. This survey was door-to-door and posted through letterboxes to nearly every household within a 3-mile radius of Monymusk. The survey was accompanied by an information sheet and stated: "In the interests of impartiality we would encourage you to complete this survey after the drop-in session on February 28 at which time GNE have had the opportunity to inform us more of their intentions."

FOP's survey importantly included the means to identify geographical spread of the results and allowed gathering of specific reasons for supporting or opposing the development. The delivery of the survey and information sheet at this time also served as a method of advertising the forthcoming GNE open-day. The CC had not advertised the event and, at the time of delivering the survey, nor had GNE.

The **FOP** survey showed:

- Number of survey sheets delivered to households in Monymusk and around Pitfichie Hill: **425**.
- **247** responders of which
- **217 AGAINST. 5 UNDECIDED. 25 FOR.**
- **of the total 247 responders 216 (87%)** were local with AB517 (central to Monymusk), and of these, **183 (85%) were AGAINST** the development.
- The 31 respondents who voted AGAINST but who did not have an AB517 postcode were those members of local walking groups who had,

as users of Pitfichie Hill, filled in the survey and voted against the proposed development.

We note on **p14 Section 5.1 of the CAT application**, GNE state their survey “showed 45% of 80 respondents were strongly positive”. This claim should be seen in the context of the analysis of both surveys and that their Facebook survey was available to a group of 2,300.

The panel should assess the methodology of both types of survey. FOP’s survey, although including some respondents from a Community of Interest (walkers), has identified them. The figure therefore of 85% responders who live within the immediate surrounds of Monymusk (Community of Place) objecting to the proposed development is evidence of community opposition.

APPENDICES For a more detailed analysis the following documents are attached as an appendix

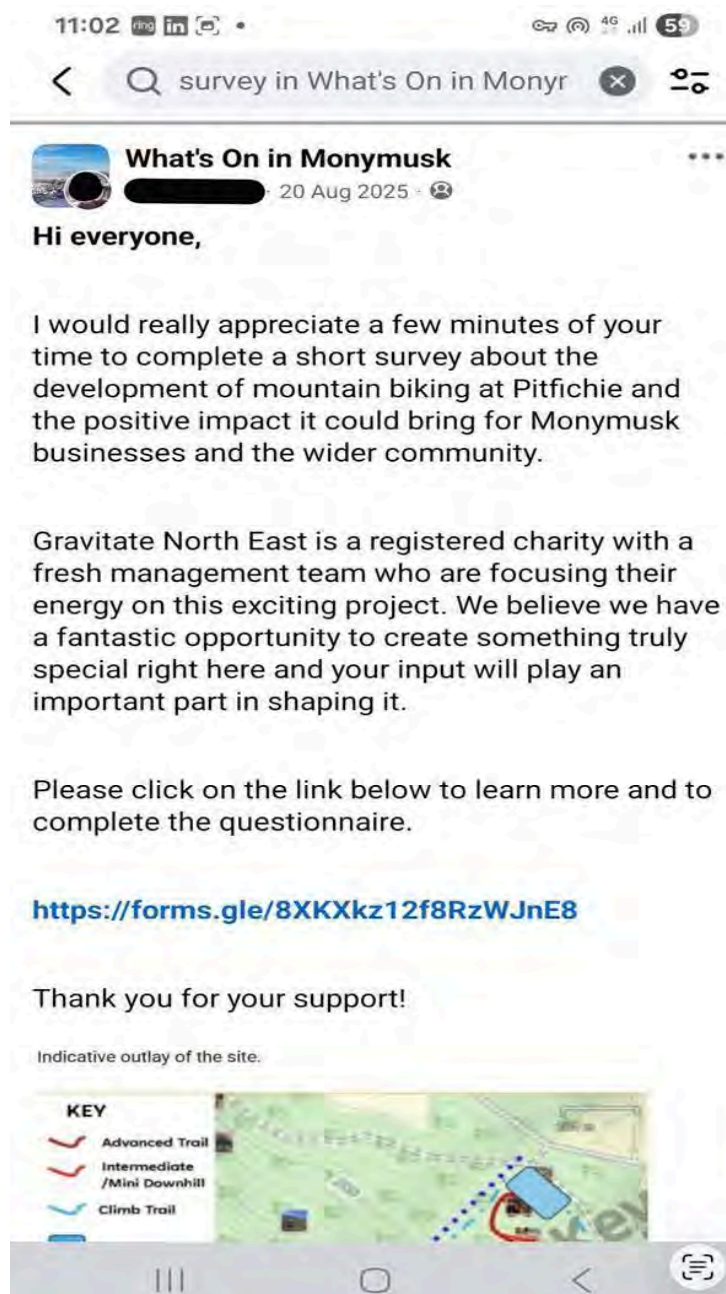
1. GNE FACEBOOK SURVEY ON FACEBOOK. 20/08/25
2. FOP Information sheet which accompanied the first survey done on 23/08/26
3. FOP SURVEY SHEET 23/08/26
4. INFORMATION SHEET accompanying FOP’s survey on FEBRUARY 2026
5. COLLATED OPINIONS FROM THE VILLAGE SURVEY RESPONSES; FEBRUARY 2026
6. AREA CANVASSED AND RETURNS GROUPED BY POSTCODE
7. VOTING TOTALS BY AREA AND PREFERENCE

SURVEY ANALYSIS APPENDICES

1. GNE FACEBOOK SURVEY ON FACEBOOK. 20/08/25
2. FOP Information sheet which accompanied the first survey done on 23/08/25
3. FOP SURVEY SHEET 28/02/26
4. INFORMATION SHEET accompanying FOP's survey in FEBRUARY 2026
5. COLLATED OPINIONS FROM THE FOP SURVEY FEBRUARY 2026
6. AREA CANVASSED AND RETURNS GROUPED BY POSTCODE
7. VOTING TOTALS BY AREA AND PREFERENCE

Appendix 1

GNE's Facebook survey 20/08/25



Appendix 2

FOP information sheet which accompanied the first survey done on 23/08/25

There is a proposal for a large down-hill biking development on Pitfichie Hill. The developers are meeting the community council this Wednesday 27th August at 7.30 in the village hall. Everyone in Monymusk is invited to come to give their opinion. The plans include a large car park for seventy cars, race courses, the provision of an 'uplift vehicle' to transport bicycles to the top of tracks and "on-site commercial opportunities with expanded visitor amenities".

According to the developers 'the site has the potential for creating development in the future for catering, bike hire/maintenance, events and camping and a hub for 'outdoor recreation' It is expected to attract 20,000 visitors per year. The outline plans indicate that parking and 'facilities' would be sited on the North side of Pitfichie Hill — ie. access would be through the village, past the school along the road to Pitfichie cross-roads and then up the single track road for half a mile before turning left onto the forestry track.

Because the development will affect everyone in the village and in the knowledge that many of you may be unable to come to the meeting, it's important to get an idea as to your feelings about the project.

Please write a brief comment followed by your name and address. Neither your name nor address will be shared with anyone. At the very least, a one word answer indicating whether you are for or against the development would be helpful before the meeting this coming Wednesday. Please write your answer on this paper and leave it in the grey metal box on the Left of the front door to the Post Office and shop before this coming Wednesday 4pm.

Appendix 3.

FOP survey sheet 28/02/26

COMMUNITY SURVEY

PROPOSED PITFICHIE HILL DOWNHILL MOUNTAIN

BIKE TRAILS DEVELOPMENT

On **Saturday 28 February, 10am–4pm**, Gravitare North East, a group wanting to develop Pitfichie Hill into a world-class downhill biking centre, will be holding a drop-in session in **Monymusk village hall** to present their plans. As this proposed development will have an impact on the village and surrounding area, you are invited to come to the meeting to find out more. In the interests of impartiality we would encourage you to complete this survey after the drop-in session on Feb.28th at which time GNE have had the opportunity to inform us more of their intentions.

The views of local residents are needed in order to guide those involved in the planning process. Survey forms are being delivered door-to-door to ensure everyone has the opportunity to participate. Each member of a household is allowed to submit a separate vote. If you have already completed a survey, please do not complete a further copy

Please tick ONE box We've made provision below for three members of a household if there are more, who are of voting age, then just put in their vote manually underneath and remember to add names.

- | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ☐ FOR | ☐ UNDECIDED | ☐ AGAINST |
| ☐ FOR | ☐ UNDECIDED | ☐ AGAINST |
| ☐ FOR | ☐ UNDECIDED | ☐ AGAINST |

Comments (optional):

Post Code to show you are a resident of Monymusk:

.....TEAROFF.....
.....

To prevent duplicate responses please provide your details. This information will remain confidential and will be securely destroyed once the results have been recorded.

Name(s) of householders:

Appendix 4

INFORMATION SHEET ACCOMPANYING FOP's SURVEY FEBRUARY 2026

On Saturday 28 February, 10am–4pm, Gravitate North East, a group wanting to develop Pitfichie Hill into a “world-class” downhill biking centre will be holding a drop-in session in Monymusk village hall to present their plans. Anyone is welcome to come. The proposal has the potential to permanently change the character of Monymusk village and the surrounding landscape and natural environment.

THIS IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE YOUR SAY

GNE's published outline plans include:

- Two new downhill biking competition level routes with uplift vehicles which will save bikers having to walk or cycle uphill.
- The developers state they expect over 20,000 visitors per year. Tarland trails, not dissimilar in size to Pitfichie, with no uplift vehicles and more remote from Aberdeen has attracted 40,000 visitors a year. Glentress, a ‘world-class’ site, albeit larger than the one planned here, attracts about 300,000 each year. (Figures given by Visit Scotland, Forestry Land Scotland and North East Adventure Tourism.) Looking at these figures and considering that downhill biking is a growing sport we think the estimate of 20,000 is low but if true, equates to 70 cars every weekend day during the Summer. The effect on the environment caused by litter, erosion and pollution is likely to be significant.
- Their current plan is to build a parking area for 70 cars. Our research suggests that this will be inadequate to cope with potentially much larger numbers of visitors, many of whom will travel in campervans.
- “Strong potential for future expansion”, as stated in their outline plan.
- Access routed through Monymusk village, past the primary school, then for a mile and a half along the single-track road at Pitfichie.
- It is likely that, wherever the development is sited, there will be safety issues and/or restricted access for other members of the public who walk over and around Pitfichie Hill.

A similar project elsewhere was halted following local opposition.

If you value the landscape, wildlife and the peace of this area, please consider attending the session on 28 February to make your views known.

If you are unable to attend, please reply to this email stating whether you are for or against the development. We would encourage everyone in a household to vote — ie a single vote for each person of voting age, living in the house. Also, please spread the word to other like minded individuals.

Please give your name, address and postcode to prevent any duplication. All contact details will be held confidentially and will be destroyed after counting.

Appendix 5

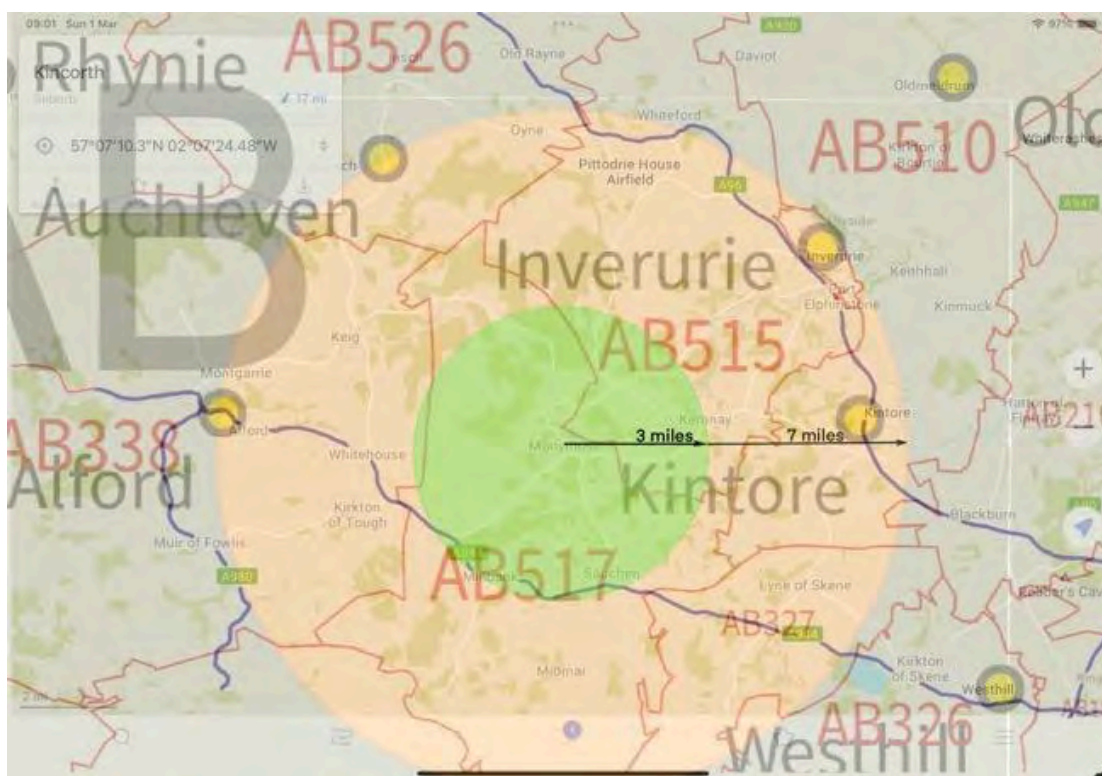
COLLATED OPINIONS FROM THE VILLAGE SURVEY RESPONSES

February 2026

Sum of concerns	COLLATED OPINIONS GATHERED FROM INDIVIDUAL'S RESPONSES TO THE SURVEY, INCLUDING THOSE IN FAVOUR, UNDECIDED AND THOSE AGAINST
26	Hazardous, restricted or prohibited access to walkers, dogs, horse riders; has happened on Tarland trails and Pittenderrich Hill; incompatible with Right to Roam
75	Traffic congestion and pollution on small roads, especially past Monymusk school and square and other small villages on the route
23	Road surface and verge damage due to increased traffic and few passing places
15	Car park inadequate for event numbers; car-park charging will cause roadside parking to avoid paying fees; roadside and in-gateway parking will cause obstruction
5	Road obstruction caused by parked vehicles will restrict access by emergency services
44	Wildlife death, injury, nesting disruption and disturbance of rare and protected species
2	Personal security issues; stranger danger
46	Reduced peace and tranquillity, mindfulness, opportunity for healthy exercise for the majority of hill users
30	Loss of wildlife habitat; incompatible with statutory planning objectives for protection of wildlife and habitat, damage to peat deposits
24	Noise and pollution from uplift vehicles, tannoy announcements, music, crowd noise
18	Increase in amount of litter
9	Increase of 'no-go' areas created by creation of shortcuts and unauthorised/illegal trails
9	Physical danger, disrespect from existing trail bike users; will increase due to greater number of encounters, especially when in groups on road and trail
30	Wild camping and BBQ debris is likely to increase; overnight campervan misuse of car park will cause local disturbance
16	No benefit to village; no shop, no hotel, no post office to benefit from increased visitor footfall, no proposal to provide support for village activities
16	Why chose Pitfichie Hill; why not chose existing sites/infrastructure e.g. The Lecht, Glenshea
4	How often and who maintains toilets? Will toilet pump truck manage narrow unmade, steep track. Inappropriate use of countryside as a wild toilet and dumping of
7	Damage, erosion to existing walking tracks, when used by mountain bikers
6	Visitor numbers will be exceeded; e.g. Tarland estimate greatly exceeded; misleading statistics provided by GNE
12	Uplift vehicles will encourage bikers to explore beyond authorised bike trails; on paths intended for other hill-users; spreading problems over a larger area
33	Spoil natural beauty and damage village character and heritage
22	Disruption to and contamination of existing local-resident water supplies due to uplift vehicles, excavating trails
6	Expand shop and café; brings income to village; provides jobs
4	Promote and expand outdoor activities
1	Make path through Monymusk estate, for safe passage to Pitfichie Hill
2	Misleading propaganda (unspecified) by opposers
485	TOTAL OF CONCERNS RAISED
353	TOP 10 CONCERNS RAISED

Appendix 6.

AREA CANVASSED AND RETURNS GROUPED BY POSTCODE



Appendix 7

Voting totals by area and preference

POSTAL CODES CENTRED ON MONYMUSK					
AB327	WESTHILL	2		Within 7 miles of Monymusk centre	Within all Postcodes listed
AB510	KINTORE	1			
AB338	ALFORD	14			
AB515	INVERURIE	41			
AB517	MONYMUSK	212	Within 3 miles		
AB107	GARTHDEE	2			
AB156	HAZLEHEAD	1			
AB157	MANOFIELD	1			
AB365	CORGARFF	2			
AB411	ELLON	1			
AB534	TURRIFF	3			
CA270	ST BEES	2			
AB101	ABERDEEN	1			
N/A		2			
TOTAL OF VOTES		247	216	274	289

Voting Totals Analysis by Area and Preference

Postcode	Place	Votes			
		Running Total	Against N	Undec	For Y
AB534BB	TURRIFF	228	N		
AB534BB	TURRIFF	229	N		
AB517AE	BRAEHEAD	230	N		
AB517AE	BRAEHEAD	231	N		
AB517AE	BRAEHEAD	232	N		
AB517AE	BRAEHEAD	233	N		
AB515NYE	KEMNAY	234			Y
AB534SP	TURRIFF	235	N		
AB517JA	MONYMUSK	236	N		
AB517JA	MONYMUSK	237	N		
AB517SS	MONYMUSK	238	N		
Screenishot	NYMUSK	239	N		
AB338DT	KEIG	240	N		
AB517HH	MST MARYS MON	241	N		
AB101	ABERDEEN	242	N		
AB338BN	ALFORD	243	N		
AB338BN	ALFORD	244	N		
AB338BN	ALFORD	245	N		
AB517HJ	SQUARE MONY	246	N		
AB517HJ	SQUARE MONY	247	N		
VOTING TOTALS		Total	Against	Undec	For
		247	217	5	25
VOTING TOTALS WITHIN 3 MILES RADIUS OF MONYMUSK		216	183	5	24

TRAFFIC ANALYSIS

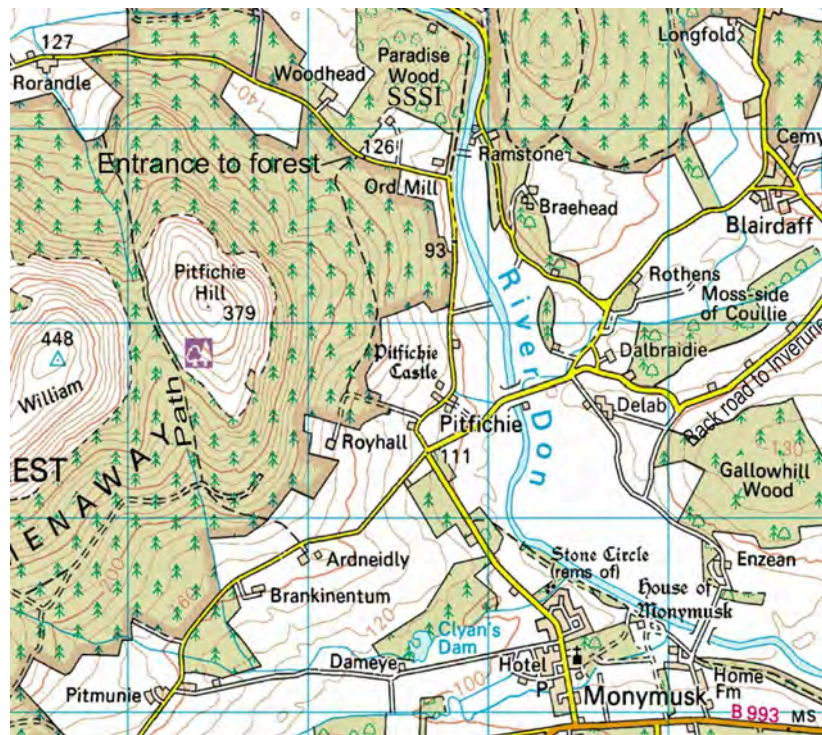
Issues with the proposed access route.

The population centre of Aberdeen is 21 miles away from the proposed development. The majority of traffic will come from the B993 Kemnay to Alford road. Traffic will then come **through Monymusk village square, past the play park and primary school** along the Northerly road which forms part of a **core path**, used by walkers going through woods at Clyans Dam. After three quarters of a mile from the village, at Pitfichie crossroads, the proposed access route continues for **1.3 miles along the single track, dead end road before turning L into the entrance to the forest.**

There is currently no speed restriction (60mph) on the B993 at the junction with Monymusk. This junction is further compromised on exiting the village by a blind turning from the minor Monymusk road onto the more major B993 because of the B listed Toll House.

The village itself is a conservation area.

Some traffic will approach the centre via the minor road from Inverurie. This road has passing places for about two miles until just before the bridge over the river Don. There is a sharp, blind, R hand turn from this road onto the single track road up to the forestry entrance.





The road through the village square — with its listed buildings — looking up towards the T junction with the B993 Inverurie to Alford. Due to parked cars, the **road through the village is essentially single track** because the road is not wide enough to allow more than two cars' widths.

The **proposed single track dead end access road** runs from Pitfichie crossroads **1.3 miles to the forest entrance**. The **road width is 3 metres**.

There are 3 official passing places and two more 'unofficial'.

The road has regular farm traffic. The farmers at Rorandle not only have their own land to work locally but, as farming contractors, work on land elsewhere. There are 17 households along the whole length of single track road up to Cornabo (ie. this includes those beyond the turn off to the forest).

See map below.



The majority of traffic will pass through the village square.





Farm traffic on the road.

The access road is a narrow, surfaced carriageway with limited passing provision, deteriorating edges and observed surface-water problems.



Following heavy rainfall, substantial surface water flows longitudinally along the carriageway.



Click here to see the video: [Access road flooding.MOV](#)

ROAD USE

Current traffic levels

1. Council measurements in May 2024 within the village of Monymusk itself.

May 8-15 traffic past the school 4378 both ways. This captures through traffic and excludes the majority of villagers who live in St.Thomas' and St.Ninian's and who tend to work in Aberdeen. It will also include children being dropped off at school. This gives a daily average of **313** vehicles in one direction passing through the village.

2. Our measurements April and May 2026 outwith the village and on the single track access road —One way uphill traffic. See blue dot on the map for where the measurements were taken automatically by camera.
Week 1 from April 16th 2026 one way traffic 6am to 8pm. 326 vehicles
This gives a daily average **46** cars per day going up the single track access road. **89** cars over the weekend

Almost identical figures were found a couple of weeks later
Week 2 starting May 4th 2026 one way traffic 6am to 8pm. 312 vehicles
daily average **45** cars per day.
85 cars over the weekend.

We measured traffic using a wildlife camera for accuracy. To comply with data protection all identities of drivers and vehicles were blurred so that they were unrecognisable.

SUMMARY OF PRESENT LEVELS OF TRAFFIC IN ONE DIRECTION

Through the village past the school: 313 per day

Along the single track access road: 46 per day

FOP's Assessment of increase in traffic.

Tarland trails in Aberdeenshire, which are similar to the trails in Monymusk, have measured visitor numbers of **40,000** per year.

The materially higher visitor numbers recorded at Tarland demonstrate that the FLS panel should sensitivity-test the access assessment against visitor levels materially above GNE's 20,000 forecast.



Press and Journal

<https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk> › business › local › t... ⋮

Deeside's Tarland Trails to open first hand-built course

16 Jun 2025 — **Around 40,000 people enjoyed the Tarland Trails last year** with 56,000 visitor the year before. It came after the opening of the 11-mile long ... [Read more](#)

The total length of trails at **Tarland is 20km as are those at Pitfichie.**

<https://www.cyclegrampian.co.uk/mtb/routes/pitfichie.html>

The popularity of Pitfichie will be increased by having 'uplift' vehicles. Tarland has no uplift vehicles.

The main population centre in this area is Aberdeen. **Pitfichie is 21 miles from Aberdeen. Tarland is 32 miles from Aberdeen.** It is an accepted fact that **downhill biking is a growing sport as is mountain biking generally.** Of note is the fact that GNE have stated in their preliminary Project Overview: 'Pitfichie Hill itself has strong potential for **further development** in the future for catering, bike hire/maintenance, events and camping, creating a hub for outdoor recreation'.

Enduro events at Pitfichie attract between 250 to 300 competitors with associated numbers of supporters and onlookers. GNE plan to hold five organised competitive, weekend, events per year.

GNE have not explained plans to accommodate and transport these large numbers of competitors with associated supporters and onlookers up a single track road.

Using figures derived using observed travel characteristics from Glentress Forest our analysis indicates that approximately 75% of visitors arrive by single-occupancy vehicle, with the remainder arriving in shared vehicles. This results in an average vehicle occupancy of 1.375 persons per car. Visitor demand is highly seasonal, with approximately 75% of visits occurring during the seven-month period from April to October. In addition, surveys at comparable sites indicate a strong weekend bias, with approximately 65% of weekly visits occurring on Saturdays and Sundays.

Based on these assumptions, the following average daily vehicle flows have been derived.

Vehicle assessment for 40,000, 30,000 and 20,000 visitors per year.

Figures show predicted increased vehicle numbers based on different visitor numbers

Period	40,000 visitors	30,000 visitors	20,000 visitors
Annual visitors	40,000	30,000	20,000
Estimated vehicle arrivals/year	~29,100	~21,825	~14,550
Annual average vehicles/day	~80	~60	~40
Peak season – average weekday	~50	~38	~25
Peak season – weekend	~230	~173	~115
Off-season – average weekday	~25	~19	~13
Off-season – weekend	~110	~83	~55
Recommended upper-bound assessment	250–300	188–225	125–150

Conclusion and summary of objection.

We have made three assessments based on three different visitor numbers..

Even at 20,000 it is more than the proposed access route can cope with

The increased weight of traffic would lead to an irrevocable change in the character of Monymusk as well as creating a disproportionate burden for the local community.

Historic Environment Scotland: ‘The historical evidence available for the designed landscape (of the village) is remarkable and gives this site outstanding Historical value.’

<https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/apex/f?p=1505:300:::::VIEWTYPE,VIEWREF:designation,GDL00289>

The 1.3 miles of single track road with passing places is unsuitable for the potential weight of traffic for reasons of width, structure and state.

GNE have stated that the car park capacity will be 76 cars and that in itself will act to limit the number of visitors. Also stated is: 'a booking system could be extended to car parking to further cap rider numbers during peak periods.' There is to be a charge for car parking operated through solar powered vending machines. We believe this will create further problems as has occurred at the nearby forest car park at the Donview centre where the act of charging for parking has led to **visitors parking in lay-bys and on the verge** of a very narrow road. Likewise, cars that arrive to find the car park full will simply park on the verge or at the entrance to Paradise Woods which is an SSSI. Clearly, **parking charges would apply to those regular visitors who walk in the forest and have for years parked informally** in the wide area of track at the entrance to the forest. Therefore, there will be further restriction of access to other recreational groups.

We note that in mitigation for increased traffic along the single track road, GNE are intending to provide more passing places several of which are in driveways or on private land. Have GNE confirmed with landowners that their land can be used as a passing place? Have GNE's plans taken into account the size of agricultural vehicles with trailers?

3.10 of Planning statement — camping on site will be prevented. How will camping be prevented and does this include camper vans?

4.1 of Planning statement — where precisely are tree branches to be cut?

GNE have made their estimate of 20,000 visitors per year on the grounds that tickets for the uplift vehicles will be limited. This will not stop people coming in the hopes of using the uplift service and they are unlikely to go away having travelled to the centre. Mountain biking is an increasingly popular sport. The mere fact that there is a 'centre' will attract visitors. All this needs to be taken into account when considering visitor numbers.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: [REDACTED] on behalf of Friends of Pitfichie re GNE's application for CAT.
Date: 15 September 2026 23:08:29
Attachments: [ATT00001.txt](#)

Dear Rebecca,

Further to my representation, I thought I should bring one subsequent factual development to FLS's attention.

GNE's financial material identifies £357,000 as 'Pending — Just Transition application'. I have now received written confirmation from the Scottish Government Just Transition Unit that the application was unsuccessful and was not included in the latest awards announced on 1 September 2026.

I attach that confirmation for completeness. I leave it to FLS to determine what significance, if any, this has for its assessment of the CAT request and GNE's current funding position.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

From: JustTransitionFund@gov.scot
Date: 15 September 2026 at 13:25:40 BST
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: **RE: A question about funding for Gravitare North East re a development for a downhill biking centre on Pitfichie Hill.**

Thanks [REDACTED]

And thanks for the email on behalf of Friends of Pitfichie.

In regards to Just Transition Fund decisions, Scottish Government have now published the latest list of project awards for the Fund [here](#). These were released on 1 September. The application in question is not on the list and was not successful in its application for Just Transition Fund support.

Hope this is a useful clarification.

Best

Ben

[REDACTED]

Just Transition Unit – Scottish Government

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Addendum to FOP's document which was sent yesterday 14/09/26
Date: 15 September 2026 12:01:09

Dear Rebecca,

Please add this as an addendum to our document objecting to GNE's proposed downhill biking site:
Where in the financial statement have GNE identified the cost of buying or renting uplift vehicles? We can see costs for drivers, MOT and tax, uplift consumables, vehicle maintenance and diesel costs but are unable to identify the cost of vehicles.

[REDACTED] on behalf of Friends of Pitfichie.
[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

81

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie CATS application by Gravitare - Support letter
Date: 14 September 2026 08:05:08

Good morning,

I'd like to express my support of this application. Pitfichie needs a formal MTB operator to run more smoothly and act as an interface with the local non MTB community which will strengthen relations with all hill users. Parking is an issue locally and Gravitare can resolve that. Toilets will benefit all users not just the MTB community.

More specifically, the benefits to the local youth having a national grade DH track with coaching and uplift facilities will do wonders for the kids of Aberdeenshire and beyond. Scotland has performed well on the international stage, however almost all of our riders hail from the west coast (access to ft William) or the borders (access to Innerleithen) - both current facilities in Scotland are a 4hr drive for Aberdeenshire residents - how are kids meant to develop skills to compete with an 8hr round trip?

Beyond the kids, this benefits all local riders across the skill spectrum, as well as boosting the local economy via adventure tourism.

Any negativity towards this project is simply fear of change.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

82

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie CAT application- support letter
Date: 14 September 2026 08:56:38

Good morning,

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] from Mononymusk.

Pitfichie is a great place for mountain biking, we are planning to get permission for an uplift service a new proper DH track and a new bigger carpark. The new DH track and uplift would be absolutely great for DH riders who live locally and don't have any other uplift services nearby, so they can practise in between races and general riders who want a go at uplift and a new track. We need somewhere to practice so we can get to the world cups. We would need a carpark because if an uplift does get built then we will need a big carpark for riders.



Sent from my iPhone

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

Gravitate North East — Pitfichie Hill*Submitted by email to Forestry and Land Scotland*

14 September 2026

Introduction

I submit this representation in relation to Gravitate North East's request for a 25-year lease at Pitfichie Hill under Forestry and Land Scotland's Community Asset Transfer Scheme.

I do not suggest that community asset transfer, or mountain biking, is objectionable in principle. My concern is whether the evidence presently before FLS is sufficiently robust to support a 25-year commitment of a public asset on the terms proposed, and whether the financial, operational and residual risks to FLS and the public purse have been properly identified, tested and secured.

I recognise the statutory framework. Section 82(5) of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 provides that a relevant authority must agree to an asset transfer request unless there are reasonable grounds for refusing it. Section 82(3) requires FLS to consider the reasons for the request, supporting information, the benefits which may arise, alternative proposals, its own functions and obligations, and such other matters as it considers relevant.

This representation does not invite FLS to apply a different test. It identifies matters which, in my submission, require to be resolved when FLS assesses viability, sustainability, public benefit, financial benefit, Best Value and the terms upon which any 25-year interest in the National Forest Estate should be granted.

FLS's published process also provides that CATS requests are assessed by an independent Panel against the published criteria, with community and stakeholder representations forming part of the material considered. FLS then considers the validated request, the Panel assessment and recommendation, representations and other material properly before it when reaching its decision.

FLS's CATS Best Value guidance recognises that more complex and high-value assets may require strong and detailed evidence to permit a robust Best Value assessment. The present proposal combines a long lease, substantial capital expenditure, vehicle-based uplift, event use, parking, trails and continuing operational obligations. The points below are directed to whether that evidence is sufficiently complete and internally consistent for determination.

1. Financial model: 25-year commitment against a ten-year horizon

The proposed legal commitment is for 25 years, yet the detailed financial workbook models ten years. A ten-year model cannot, without further evidence, establish the lifecycle viability of a 25-year facility.

FLS should therefore satisfy itself by reference to a reconciled 25-year model, or an equivalent lifecycle assessment, covering inflation, insurance, staffing and professional costs, maintenance, replacement capital, vehicle replacement, toilet and waste servicing, road and trail maintenance, major repairs, event costs, legal and accounting costs, compliance costs and decommissioning or reinstatement.

The submitted workbook also requires reconciliation on its own terms. The Financial Commentary models two eight-seat vans, four uplift runs per hour, operation for 50 weeks and four days per week, while allowing five bad-weather weeks. The Staffing worksheet instead costs two drivers for 45 weeks. The Commentary states employer costs at 40% of salary, whereas the Staffing worksheet applies 30%. These differences may be capable of explanation, but they should be reconciled before material weight is placed upon the forecast uplift margin.

The newly published Commentary on the Financial Spreadsheet adds further figures which should be reconciled with the workbook rather than treated as a separate narrative case. It states that stabilised annual income from uplift and parking will be approximately £150,000, against £15,000 cost of sales and £120,000 operating costs, producing approximately £15,000 net profit. In the same section it states that car-park income is £18,000 per annum, donations and event-related charges total £25,000 per annum, and car-park operating costs are £20,500 per annum, yet gives a forecast net profit before tax of £5,000 for that element. On the face of those figures, the stated component revenues and costs do not reconcile to the stated £5,000 result. FLS should require the applicant to reconcile the narrative figures to the workbook and identify precisely which figures are relied upon for viability assessment.

The capital worksheet contains a further presentational inconsistency. Initial capital totals £1.05 million, including £12,000 for no-discharge toilets, and the Financial Summary uses £1.05 million. The displayed 'Total' column on the capital worksheet is £1.038 million because the toilet line is not carried into that total column. Again, this may be a spreadsheet error rather than a substantive problem; it should nevertheless be corrected in the financial material relied upon by the Panel.

The workbook also presents a negative net present value of approximately £966,400 and an internal rate of return of approximately -25.45%, alongside an indicated 11-year payback. The ten-year cumulative cash position remains materially negative and does not, on its face, demonstrate recovery of the initial capital expenditure within the model period. Grant funding may affect how those investment metrics should properly be interpreted. The appropriate course is therefore for FLS to require a clear explanation of what the metrics and stated payback are intended to demonstrate, rather than treating them as self-explanatory evidence of viability.

2. Operating margin and lifecycle costs

The operating case appears dependent upon relatively modest projected surpluses when compared with the scale and duration of the undertaking. FLS should be satisfied that the model captures the ordinary costs of running a public recreational facility over the whole lease period rather than concentrating on construction and headline operating income.

- Toilet cleaning and servicing, waste collection and litter management.
- Site administration, bookkeeping, accountancy and annual reporting.
- Insurance and health-and-safety compliance.
- Professional, legal and technical advice where required.
- CCTV, payment systems, communications and security.
- Trail, road, car-park, signage and drainage maintenance.
- Vehicle maintenance and eventual replacement.
- Event management, stewarding and traffic controls.
- Emergency works, storm damage and abnormal maintenance.
- Paid staffing or contractor costs if volunteer capacity is unavailable.

If material costs are absent, understated or assumed to be supplied indefinitely without charge, that should be identified expressly in the assessment of sustainability and use of resources.

3. Funding certainty and public-capital exposure

The financial material states an estimated capital requirement of approximately £1.1 million, with £28,000 already raised. The newly published Commentary on the Financial Spreadsheet describes funding sources as including £500,000 from the Scottish Cycling Facilities Fund, support from Opportunity North East and additional grant funding currently being pursued. The capital worksheet separately lists funding headings including Just Transition applications and a number of prospective funding sources.

The wording '£500,000 from the Scottish Cycling Facilities Fund' is capable of being read as committed funding, whereas the wider material has previously presented substantial elements of the funding package as prospective or pending. Before financial benefit or deliverability is credited, FLS should record the actual status, amount, conditions and drawdown requirements of each material funding source, supported where appropriate by the relevant award or offer documentation.

FLS should distinguish clearly between money already held, funding formally awarded and unconditional, funding awarded subject to conditions, applications awaiting determination, and prospective or aspirational funding. The assessment should use the funding position as it stands at determination, not the maximum aggregate of possible funding sources.

Where public grant funding forms a substantial part of the capital structure, the assessment should consider the overall public-sector position rather than treating each funding stream in isolation. A structure in which substantial public capital is invested in a facility which then occupies National Forest Estate land for 25 years may be justified by evidenced public benefits, but the Best Value assessment should make the overall bargain transparent.

4. Consideration, valuation and Best Value

The Asset Transfer Request (section 3B) proposes a fixed annual rent of £3,000 together with 8% of uplift turnover. The newly published Commentary on the Financial Spreadsheet describes the arrangement as £3,000 fixed annual rent plus an 8% 'profit share' during the first three years and estimates the annual lease at approximately £21,000. Its Appendix 1 instead states a minimum base rent of £3,000 and a fee based on 8% of uplift turnover, including the £3,000 base rent. The FLS Rent worksheet applies 8% to total turnover for each of the ten modelled years, subject to the £3,000 minimum. Those formulations are materially different.

The stated annual lease estimate of approximately £21,000 also requires explanation. On the figures stated in the same Commentary, forecast uplift income is approximately £124,000 per annum and stabilised overall uplift and car-park income approximately £150,000 per annum. Neither 8% of the stated uplift turnover nor 8% of the stated overall turnover produces an annual payment of approximately £21,000. FLS should therefore require a single arithmetically reconciled statement of the proposed rent, turnover share or profit share, its duration and the revenue base to which any percentage applies.

FLS should establish and record the precise consideration proposed before assessing financial benefit or Best Value. The decision record should identify the market valuation, any discount or concession, the community benefits relied upon to justify it, and any continuing public costs or residual liabilities created by the arrangement.

The relevant assessment is the whole transaction: duration, public investment, retained liabilities, operational burden, failure risk and the enforceable benefits obtained in return. FLS's Best Value guidance expressly contemplates quantifying public costs as well as community financial benefits and assessing additionality.

If the project is substantially or fully funded at or around the stated capital requirement, FLS should also explain the commercial rationale for the proposed rent and consideration and whether alternative structures — including greater advance consideration, additional security, staged commitments or review points — were considered to protect the public asset over the 25-year term.

5. Previous publicly supported project development and value for money

The present request should also be considered in the context of the applicant's earlier project-development history. Aberdeenshire Council's Kincardine and Mearns Area Committee minute of 7 June 2016 records that the then North East Trail Centre Organisation sought support towards a £24,660 feasibility study to identify a preferred site for a mountain-bike trail centre. The sites included Blackhall, Hill of Fare, Pittfichie and Durris. The Committee gave support in principle and asked the organisation to re-apply once the remaining funding was in place.

The applicant's own current community-support material confirms that Durris and a site near Aboyne were subsequently investigated but were not pursued because of ground conditions and lease agreements. Separately, Scottish Government records concerning the North East Adventure Tourism programme record that a Gravitare North East project did

not proceed within the relevant funding period because a suitable site could not be secured, with difficulties including landowner cooperation, suitable ground conditions and elevation; the funding for that project was withdrawn.

I do not suggest that expenditure on feasibility or project development is improper merely because a proposal does not ultimately proceed. Nor do I advance an aggregate historic public-spend figure which the material presently available does not safely establish.

The history is nevertheless relevant to Best Value and deliverability. Before committing a further long-term interest in the National Forest Estate, FLS should satisfy itself, so far as reasonably practicable, as to what publicly supported feasibility or development work has previously been undertaken for NETCO/GNE, what usable outputs were obtained, whether any of that work informs the present Pitfichie proposal, and what lessons from the earlier site-selection and delivery difficulties have been applied to the present assessment.

That is particularly relevant because Pitfichie itself formed part of the earlier site-selection exercise. The point is not to count historic work against GNE; it is to ensure that previous publicly supported evidence and lessons are not disregarded when further public exposure is considered.

6. Security, default, break and review provisions

A 25-year lease requires a clear answer to what happens if the project ceases to be viable, the charity becomes insolvent, governance fails, key funding conditions are breached, insurance becomes unavailable, or the facility is abandoned.

FLS should identify the proposed default and termination provisions, any break or review mechanisms, financial security, bond, guarantee or reserve, and who bears the cost of making the site safe and reinstating or removing infrastructure.

A periodic review mechanism would also appear prudent. A project which is viable in Years 1-5 may not remain so in Years 15-25. FLS should be able to monitor delivery of the benefits used to justify the transaction and intervene where material obligations are not being met.

7. Decommissioning and reinstatement

The apparent decommissioning or storm reserve of approximately £15,000 should be tested against the realistic cost of securing, removing or reinstating a facility of this scale. FLS should not assume that a future insolvent or inactive tenant will be able to fund reinstatement merely because the lease places the obligation upon it.

The Panel should identify the likely reinstatement exposure and the mechanism by which that exposure is secured throughout the lease. If FLS would ultimately have to step in where the tenant cannot perform, that residual public liability is relevant to Best Value and viability.

8. Governance, staffing and volunteer dependency

The proposed operation appears to depend materially upon volunteer effort. Volunteer contribution is a legitimate strength, but it is not a substitute for demonstrating that safety-critical, regulatory, financial and operational functions can be delivered reliably for 25 years.

The assessment should distinguish functions which may reasonably be undertaken by volunteers from those requiring paid, professional or contracted support, and identify the cost of replacing volunteer labour if participation falls. It should also address trustee succession and the possibility that future trustees or staff may require remuneration or professional support not presently reflected in the model.

9. Uplift operation: revenue must be tied to a deliverable operation

The uplift is central to the applicant's operating model. The Financial Commentary forecasts annual uplift income of approximately £124,000 and models two eight-seat vans. The Site Operation Plan requires vehicle maintenance, driver recruitment and training, daily vehicle and trailer checks, and management of uplift vehicles sharing forest roads with other users.

The submitted material identifies uplift infrastructure and access rights, but I have not identified a single consolidated plan which defines the complete operational route from pick-up to each rider drop-off point and reconciles that route with the vehicle assumptions in the financial model. The published material variously refers to existing forestry roads, a 3.5m Lower Climb Trail, turning and drop-off arrangements, a 1.5m Upper Climb Trail and, within the CAT area material, an 'Upper Uplift to top DH1'. FLS should therefore identify the complete route, turning and drop-off points, the sections of existing forest road and new construction, the vehicle use authorised on each section, and the associated maintenance and safety obligations.

Given the material contribution of uplift income to the financial model, FLS should be satisfied that the operation upon which that income depends is physically deliverable, legally authorised and adequately costed before material credit is given to the forecast uplift revenue.

10. Land, ancillary rights and the transaction actually being valued

The formal request describes a lease footprint of approximately 1.24 hectares. Other submitted material describes wider trail corridors and management or access arrangements associated with trails, uplift, roads and events. I do not suggest that those figures are necessarily inconsistent: a lease area and ancillary rights can properly differ.

The Best Value assessment should nevertheless identify precisely what FLS is granting and valuing: the leased subjects, road and uplift rights, turning and event areas, management rights, parking arrangements and any other ancillary rights or third-party dependencies. The public consideration should be assessed against the whole package of rights required to operate the proposal, not simply the headline lease acreage.

Any future aspiration to expand trails, commercial services, events, camping or other facilities should not be treated as an existing benefit unless it forms part of the request and

is sufficiently evidenced. The lease should also make clear what future expansion requires further FLS consent, planning permission or variation of the CAT arrangement.

11. Additionality and claimed local economic benefit

Pitfichie is already an established mountain-biking destination. The applicant itself describes existing natural and purpose-built trails, Scottish competition use and existing visitor activity. Publicly available DMBinS material also records existing riding and previous trail work at Pitfichie. Benefits which already arise from the existing destination, existing trails or previous investment should not automatically be attributed to the proposed 25-year transfer.

The local economic benefit should likewise be assessed on evidence rather than assumed from visitor numbers. Where the applicant relies upon additional visitor expenditure or regional economic benefit, FLS should identify the assumptions, displacement or leakage, and the genuinely additional benefit caused by the proposed transaction.

The newly published Commentary now estimates a contribution of approximately £250,000 annually to the regional economy and identifies a number of organisations as strategic partners. If material weight is to be given to the £250,000 figure, FLS should identify the calculation, assumptions, geographical area, displacement and leakage underlying it. Where partnership or support is relied upon as evidence of deliverability or benefit, the assessment should distinguish established commitments from intended engagement, expressions of support or organisations from which advice is still to be sought.

12. Alternatives and proportionality

The assessment should consider whether the public benefits relied upon require the full transaction proposed, or whether materially similar benefits could be achieved through a different lease structure, shorter commitment, staged arrangement, licence, management agreement or other form of permission with lower public exposure.

The purpose is not to prescribe FLS's commercial terms. It is to ensure that the extent and duration of the public commitment are proportionate to the evidence of benefit and risk.

13. Validated request, later material and procedural fairness

I sought clarification from FLS as to the basis upon which representations should be made and the treatment of information received after validation. By email dated 8 September 2026, the Community Asset Transfer Manager confirmed that the documents published by FLS comprise the validated Asset Transfer Request and constitute the basis upon which representations are currently invited.

On 14 September 2026, immediately before submission, I identified that FLS's Pitfichie Hill webpage was displaying a ninth supporting document, 'Commentary on the Financial Spreadsheet'. That document had not formed part of the eight-document set which I had previously reviewed in preparing this representation and appears to have been uploaded within the preceding day or so. I have therefore undertaken a further review and have amended this representation where the additional material is relevant. I make no criticism merely from the timing of publication; the point is procedural. Representors should have a

fair opportunity to address material which FLS intends to place before the Panel or rely upon at determination.

There is an important distinction between answering a representation and materially altering the financial, operational or land-use basis upon which the request was consulted upon.

FLS also confirmed that it may take account of additional information material to the request which is properly before it at determination, but that information received during the assessment process does not of itself amend or replace the validated Asset Transfer Request. FLS has been notified of planning application APP/2026/1295 and has not, at this stage, determined whether information within that application constitutes a material change to the validated request.

The Community Asset Transfer Manager further confirmed that, where later information is considered to materially alter the substance or principal elements of the proposal, FLS will determine whether further procedural steps are required in accordance with the applicable legislative framework, Scottish Government guidance and the principles of fairness and transparency.

I have therefore prepared this representation by reference to the validated request and supporting documents published by FLS. Where subsequent planning material is relevant to practical deliverability, I treat it as subsequent evidence rather than assume that it has amended the validated Asset Transfer Request.

If material information is subsequently relied upon which alters the financial, operational, land-use or other principal basis of the proposal addressed in this representation, I respectfully ask FLS to apply the procedural approach described in its email of 8 September 2026 and to ensure that any further procedural step required by fairness and transparency is taken before determination.

14. Decision record and legal scrutiny

I make this representation in the expectation that FLS will determine the request fairly and in accordance with the statutory framework.

Given the significance of the proposed transaction, it is reasonable to anticipate that the eventual decision and the evidential basis upon which it is reached may be subject to close public and, if necessary, legal scrutiny.

For that reason, I respectfully suggest that the decision record should demonstrate a clear evidential path from the material before FLS to the conclusions reached under the statutory and CATS criteria.

The purpose of this observation is not to anticipate any particular outcome, but to recognise that a decision involving substantial public funding, National Forest Estate land and a 25-year commitment should be capable of standing upon its recorded reasons and evidence.

15. Matters which should be resolved before determination

- A reconciled lifecycle financial model proportionate to the 25-year lease.

- Clear identification of committed, conditional and prospective capital funding at the date of determination.
- Documentary confirmation of the status, conditions and drawdown basis of the material funding sources relied upon, including the stated £500,000 Scottish Cycling Facilities Fund contribution.
- Reconciliation of the uplift assumptions, employer-cost assumption, capital-total presentation, investment metrics and stated payback period.
- Reconciliation of the newly published narrative operating figures, including the stated car-park revenues, costs and £5,000 net profit.
- A realistic replacement-capital and lifecycle-maintenance programme.
- A costed decommissioning and reinstatement plan with adequate security.
- The precise rent or consideration, including reconciliation of the 'profit share', uplift-turnover and total-turnover formulations, together with valuation and any Best Value discount or concession.
- Default, termination, break, review and monitoring provisions appropriate to a 25-year public-asset commitment.
- A definitive and authorised uplift operation linked to the revenue model.
- Evidence that staffing, professional support and volunteer assumptions are sustainable.
- Clear identification and valuation of the leased land and all ancillary rights and third-party dependencies.
- A proportionate account of earlier publicly supported project development and the lessons relevant to present deliverability and Best Value.
- Evidence supporting genuinely additional local economic and community benefit.
- The evidential and calculation basis for the newly stated approximately £250,000 annual regional-economic contribution.
- A clear procedural response to material later information, including the ninth supporting document now published, if it alters or supplements the principal basis of the validated request in a way material to representations or determination.

16. Conclusion

The central issue is not whether GNE's trustees are sincere or whether the project may produce benefits. It is whether FLS has sufficient evidence to conclude, under the statutory framework, that the proposed 25-year arrangement is financially and operationally sustainable, represents Best Value, and adequately protects the public asset if the assumptions do not materialise.

Where evidence is missing, inconsistent or dependent upon future clarification, the Panel should not award credit as though the matter were established. Where a risk is capable of being managed, the decision and lease should identify the enforceable mechanism by which it will be managed.

I therefore ask FLS to subject the request to full financial and property due diligence and to ensure that any approval is supported by a transparent Best Value assessment, a defensible lifecycle viability case and lease terms which protect the National Forest Estate and the public purse.

Documents relied upon. This representation has been cross-checked against the validated GNE Asset Transfer Request and published supporting documents; the financial workbook; the subsequently published 'Commentary on the Financial Spreadsheet'; the Site Operation Plan and Evidence of Community Support; FLS CATS Evaluation and Best Value guidance; Part 5 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and Scottish Government asset-transfer guidance; Rebecca Carr's email of 8 September 2026; the Aberdeenshire Council Kincardine and Mearns Area Committee minute of 7 June 2016; and the relevant published Scottish Government records concerning the North East Adventure Tourism / Gravitare North East project.

To: Community Asset Transfer Manager, Forestry and Land Scotland

Re: Pitfichie Hill Bike Trails and Car Park – Community Asset Transfer Request by Gravitare North East

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to formally object to the Community Asset Transfer request by Gravitare North East for a 25-year lease of land at Pitfichie Hill for the development of a car park, mountain bike trails and associated uplift facilities.

We recognise that mountain biking is an established recreational use of Pitfichie and we are not opposed to responsible mountain biking or to properly managed mountain bike facilities. Our concern is that this proposal risks changing an area of publicly owned forest which is currently available to a range of recreational users into one which is, in practice, dominated by a single user group.

We are particularly concerned about the effect of the proposal on horse riders and walkers.

1. Horsebox and trailer parking

At present there is informal free parking which is used by a range of visitors. The proposed development would replace this with a formal car park for which the applicant proposes a daily charge of £3.50.

More importantly for equestrian users, the Site Operation Plan does not appear to provide dedicated, permanently available horsebox parking. Instead it states that users of horseboxes and larger vehicles will be asked to contact Gravitare North East in advance so that a space can be designated for them.

This is not an adequate substitute for ordinary access.

Horseboxes and horse trailers require significantly more than an ordinary parking bay. There must be sufficient room to enter safely, turn, manoeuvre, park, unload and reload horses without conflict with cars, cyclists or uplift vehicles. Many horse riders also use trailers to access the countryside spontaneously and should not have to obtain prior agreement from the operator simply in order to know whether they will be able to park.

The submitted car park layout appears primarily to show standard vehicle spaces and does not demonstrate how sufficient horsebox and trailer parking and turning space will be accommodated.

If this proposal is permitted to proceed, we believe that adequate dedicated horsebox/trailer bays, turning space and safe loading and unloading areas must be incorporated into the design from the outset and protected as a condition of any lease or subsequent planning consent. Equestrian users should not be dependent upon advance booking or the goodwill of the operator to obtain a suitable space.

2. Gates and continued equestrian access

We are also extremely concerned about the proposed management of gates.

The Site Operation Plan states that the site will be open to all users throughout the year, but also states that closure of the uplift will involve locking gates on the access road at the exit of the car park and at the bottom of the existing downhill track.

These two statements require clarification.

Under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, responsible access rights extend to walkers, cyclists and horse riders over most woodland and forestry, paths and tracks. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code makes clear that land should be managed in a way which does not unreasonably obstruct or deter the exercise of those rights.

A locked forestry gate may prevent motor vehicle access while still allowing a pedestrian or cyclist to pass relatively easily. It can present a very different obstacle to somebody leading or riding a horse.

Any gate which is to be locked must therefore retain a safe, convenient and genuinely horse-accessible means of passage alongside it. This provision needs to be designed into the scheme now, rather than addressed after the development has taken place.

We ask Forestry and Land Scotland to require an equestrian access assessment of all gates and access points before determining this application.

3. Uplift vehicles and conflict with existing access routes

The horse-riding community is particularly concerned about the proposed use of motorised uplift vehicles on routes which have traditionally been used by walkers and horse riders.

It is not clear from the plans submitted by Gravitare North East exactly which route the uplift system is intended to use to transport riders to the upper part of the hill. This is a significant omission because the safety implications for existing users cannot properly be assessed without knowing where those vehicles will operate.

We therefore ask that the proposed uplift route is clearly identified before the asset transfer is determined.

Whichever route is proposed, Gravitare North East should be required to demonstrate that sufficient measures will be in place to allow walkers, horse riders and other cyclists to continue to use that route safely.

This is particularly important for horse riders. Regular movement of uplift vehicles carrying riders and bicycles could create a substantial conflict on narrow forestry tracks, especially where there is limited visibility or insufficient room for a vehicle and horse to pass safely. The potential frequency of vehicle movements also needs to be considered, rather than simply whether an individual vehicle is capable of passing another user.

There is particular concern that the proposed uplift route may include the straight track running up and over the hill between Cairn William and Pitfichie Hill. If this is the intended

route, we believe there could be significant safety implications for horse riders, walkers and cyclists using what has traditionally been a shared access route.

The assessment should therefore consider not simply whether uplift vehicles can physically use the forestry road, but whether their frequency, speed, size and interaction with other users are compatible with safe shared recreational access.

If the safe operation of an uplift service requires other users to avoid an existing route, give way repeatedly to vehicles, or effectively relinquish use of a traditional access track during operating hours, that would represent a significant loss of practical access for those users.

4. Practical access matters, not simply theoretical access

We are concerned that statements that the forest will remain "open to all users" do not in themselves guarantee meaningful access.

A route can technically remain a multi-user route while becoming intimidating, unpleasant or unsafe for some of the people entitled to use it.

This is particularly relevant where a site is being deliberately promoted as a destination for downhill and gravity mountain biking. The application describes a facility intended for downhill racing and training, including an uplift service, additional gravity trails and events involving potentially hundreds of riders.

Horses are flight animals. A high-speed cyclist appearing suddenly from behind, above or across a track can create a significant safety risk to the rider, horse, cyclist and other people nearby.

The Scottish access system depends upon responsible sharing between user groups. It should not result in one activity becoming so intensive that other legitimate users are effectively displaced.

This is not an argument that horses should use dedicated downhill mountain bike tracks. It is an argument that development of those tracks must not sever, dominate or make unsafe the existing network of tracks and forest roads used to access the wider hill.

Before this transfer is approved, there should therefore be clearly identified routes by which walkers and horse riders can travel from the parking area into and through the wider forest without being forced onto, across or immediately alongside high-speed downhill routes wherever this can reasonably be avoided.

5. Experience at Tarland Trails

Our concern is not hypothetical.

Similar concerns regarding equestrian access were raised when Tarland Trails 2 was proposed and reassurances were given that other recreational users would continue to be accommodated.

However, following development of the mountain bike facility, in practical terms there now appears to be no satisfactory horse-riding route from the main parking area onto Presendye.

That experience demonstrates why general assurances that access will remain available are not sufficient.

Once substantial infrastructure has been built and the character and use of an area has changed, it is extremely difficult for displaced users to regain practical access. Equestrian and pedestrian access therefore needs to be designed and protected **before** this development is approved, rather than left to future discussion.

6. Consultation with other recreational users should happen before approval

The application itself states that structured consultation with other user groups, including walkers and horse riders, will take place as the planning process proceeds.

We believe this is the wrong way round.

The applicant is seeking a 25-year lease of publicly owned land. The effect on existing recreational users should therefore be properly understood before Forestry and Land Scotland agrees to the transfer.

The application is understandably supported by a substantial body of evidence from the mountain biking community. However, a community asset transfer should demonstrate benefit to the wider community rather than simply the community associated with the activity being promoted.

We therefore ask that Forestry and Land Scotland consult directly with local horse riders, walking groups, Aberdeenshire Council's Access Officer and appropriate equestrian access representatives before making a decision.

7. Protecting genuinely shared recreational access

One of the great strengths of Scotland's outdoor access system is that our forests and hills are shared.

Mountain bikers have been able to enjoy extensive access to forestry and countryside because walkers, horse riders, land managers and other users have generally accepted and accommodated that shared use. Unfortunately, informal trail construction and the increasing concentration of mountain biking in some areas can gradually change the character of shared countryside until other users feel that it is no longer a safe or comfortable place for them to be.

Indeed, the application itself identifies unsanctioned trail building and poorly managed multi-user access as existing problems at Pitfichie.

Formalising mountain biking at Pitfichie should therefore be used as an opportunity to resolve those conflicts, not to reinforce them by effectively allocating more of the forest to one recreational group.

Conclusion

For these reasons, we object to the asset transfer request in its present form.

We ask Forestry and Land Scotland not to approve a 25-year lease until the impact on walkers and equestrians has been properly assessed and meaningful safeguards have been incorporated into the proposal.

If Forestry and Land Scotland is nevertheless minded to approve the transfer, we ask that binding conditions include:

- sufficient dedicated horsebox and trailer parking, including safe turning, loading and unloading space;
- no requirement for equestrian visitors to obtain prior permission or pre-book simply to use that parking;
- horse-accessible passage beside every gate which may be locked;
- a clearly identified and maintained equestrian and pedestrian route from the car park into the wider forest;
- publication and assessment of the proposed motorised uplift route before approval;
- evidence that uplift vehicles can safely share any proposed route with horses, walkers and cyclists without effectively displacing them;
- safe management of all points where downhill trails, uplift routes and shared access routes intersect;
- continued access to the wider forest when the uplift or mountain bike facility is closed;
- appropriate arrangements during events so that other recreational users are not routinely excluded;
- consultation with equestrian and walking representatives before the detailed design is approved; and
- active management and enforcement against further unauthorised trail construction outside designated mountain bike areas.

Publicly owned forestry should continue to provide meaningful recreational access for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Development for one particular sport should not come at the cost of progressively excluding those who already use and enjoy the forest in other ways.

Yours faithfully,



Grampian Branch Chair, Scottish Endurance Riding Club (SERC)

From: [REDACTED]
 To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
 Subject: Objection to Pitfichie CATs for GNE
 Date: 14 September 2026 21:02:23

Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to object to the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) proposal submitted by Gravitate North East (GNE).

I would like to draw attention to the fact that the Community Council voted against the proposal and that an independent local survey indicated that approximately **90% of respondents opposed the proposal**. There is extremely limited community support.

I also see no compelling reason why Pitfichie is the most appropriate location for this development and question whether it would deliver any meaningful net economic benefit to the wider community. Further rationale are summarised below:

1. Roads and Traffic

- The road network is fundamentally unsuitable for the scale of development proposed.
- Event traffic cannot be fully mitigated.
- The impacts will remain for the lifetime of the development, irrevocably altering the character and sense of place.

The fundamental problem is that the proposal relies on traffic passing through the historic conservation area village of Monymusk. This includes routes past the primary school, play park and other community facilities that are used throughout the day by children, families and residents.

Even if visitors did not travel directly through Monymusk, the proposal still relies on a single-track, dead-end road to access the site. The existing road could not easily be widened without substantial intervention, particularly when emergency access requirements and existing agricultural and forestry traffic are considered. The layout of the village, of course, cannot be altered.

2. Site Selection and Alternative Locations

- There are already extensive mountain bike trails at Pitfichie, which I estimate to be approximately 15-20 km in total length.
- Many alternative mountain biking facilities already exist within approximately 5-60 minutes' drive of Pitfichie.
- Having spent considerable time researching the proposal and discussing it with both mountain bikers and supporters of the project, I have not identified a clear sporting or recreational justification for the additional trails proposed.
- It remains unclear to me how the proposal will achieve the claimed public benefit.

3. Loss of Character and Change of Forest Use

- **Whilst 1.24 hectares may appear modest in terms of overall footprint, it represents a significant proportion of the accessible and heavily used recreational area of the hill.** This change would be permanent and there is no clear evidence of corresponding benefit to the local community.
- The introduction of uplift vehicles, whether ATVs, diesel vehicles, vans or electric vehicles operating repeatedly throughout the day, is not appropriate for the current environmental setting.
- **I encourage the CAT review panel to spend time on the hill during the early morning, afternoon and evening and experience the current sound environment. Consider then the impact of multiple uplift vehicles travelling throughout the day. Visual effects are only one aspect of the proposal; noise and air pollution are also relevant considerations.**
- Contrary to the applicant's assertions, it seems reasonable to assume that greater exposure and increased social media promotion would attract larger visitor numbers and more events over time. Experience elsewhere demonstrates that increased visitor pressure can create conflicts between users, increase unauthorised trail construction and place additional pressure on sensitive environments.
- The route to the saddle between the hills is clearly a narrow walking path and is not, in my

experience, a route used by forestry vehicles as has been suggested during public meetings.

It is acknowledged that 1.24 hectares is relatively small when compared with the overall footprint of Pitfichie Hill and Cairn William. However, large areas of the hillside are not readily accessible due to terrain, forestry or vegetation, making the affected area proportionally more significant than the headline figure of 1.24 Ha suggests.

4. Lack of Community Consent

- A local survey undertaken by a conservation group suggested that approximately **90% of respondents opposed the proposal.**
- Those members of the local community who support the proposal, including some mountain bikers, are already represented through the relevant community of interest. It should also be recognised that not all mountain bikers support the proposal.
- **As I stated during a public meeting of the Community Council, it is the responsibility of the Community Council to diligently and accurately represent the views of the community of place - as evidenced by the vote against the proposal.**

5. Economic Case and Financial Viability

- It is likely that many visitors would already be local to Aberdeenshire and drawn from existing mountain biking communities. As a result, spending may simply be displaced from other local facilities and destinations.
- Monymusk has only limited opportunities for visitor spending, with few local businesses that would directly benefit from increased visitor numbers.
- Any spending generated by the development may simply be redistributed from elsewhere within Aberdeenshire rather than creating genuine economic growth.
- The business model, particularly the reliance on uplift vehicle operations, does not appear to have been sufficiently stress-tested and may rely on optimistic assumptions.
- Charging approximately £140 for a family of four to use the uplift service does not appear consistent with principles of fair and equitable access.
- Given the growing prevalence and affordability of e-bikes, it is reasonable to ask what would happen if demand for uplift vehicles declines significantly. In such circumstances, who would be responsible for restoring any environmental damage associated with the construction of access routes or infrastructure?

6. Lack of Environmental Benefit

- The environmental surveys appear incomplete and rely on a relatively limited baseline data collection period.
- **Pitfichie is home to protected species which should be safeguarded and enhanced wherever possible, with ambitions extending beyond simple mitigation and maintenance of existing populations.**
- **FLS are also (historically) accountable from a biodiversity enhancement perspective and should always strive to do better in line with national policy and strategy.**
- The evidence supporting biodiversity net gain appears limited and requires further scrutiny.
- During a public meeting, GNE stated that private water supplies "will not be an issue". This assertion should be supported through rigorous assessment, evidence and appropriate mitigation measures.
- I am not convinced that the proposal is fully compatible with the objectives of the Bennachie Special Landscape Area.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this and the many other representations regarding the proposal. Should you require any further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Objection to GNE Community Asset Transfer on Pitfichie Hill, Monymusk
Date: 14 September 2026 22:28:18

Dear Sirs,

I wholeheartedly object to FLS supporting the proposed community asset transfer of part of the iconic Pitfichie Hill, Monymusk in favour of Gravitare North East because the infrastructure for this proposed development is not in place i.e. the access road is not fit for purpose, with very few passing places as it is, without the huge volume of vehicles expected to visit this site. The entrance to the proposed car park is on a blind corner with no visibility looking west on exiting the forest.

It was raised at the public meeting at Monymusk Village Hall that during organised cycle events entry to the car park would be by pre booked tickets only. My concern is that this will be difficult to "police" and un-ticketed vehicles turning up will park at random places along the route, more often than not in the passing places as happens at the moment. Are the usual dog walkers and hikers that frequent the hill on a regular basis going to be forced to pay to park in the new proposed car park, and will they be excluded on event days?

During the construction of the cycle trail, how are the hardcore materials going to be transported up the hill without decimating more of the flora and fauna, some of which is unique to the area?

[REDACTED] require access at all times for lorries delivering goods and taking produce off the farm as well as 24-hour access for emergency veterinary care. Other emergency services would also require 24-hour access as you are never sure when they might be required. As an example, [REDACTED] the Scottish Fire Brigade and FLS early one morning in August 2025 to alert them of a fire in Craigton Forrest between Rorandle Farm and Milldowrie Farm. Luckily they responded quickly and between them, [REDACTED] got it extinguished before serious damage was done. With all the additional activity on the hill, what measures will be put in place to minimise and prevent any risk of fire? As we have seen recently in the Caingorms, this can be totally devastating to the landscape, properties, animals and growing crops surrounding the forest.

It was also discussed at the meeting about the toilet facilities and the impact on water supplies feeding 8 properties in the area. It wasn't made clear at the meeting where the water supply was to be sourced for these toilets etc. Also, where is the waste from the toilets going to be stored and disposed of?

In the event of a serious emergency on the hill, is there a designated area on the hill for an air ambulance to land without disturbing any nearby stock grazing on the fields as I am led to understand that the trails at Tarland have had quite a few incidents since it has been up and running.

We were not made aware at this recent meeting how much carbon would be released into the atmosphere during these fairly extensive excavations required for the construction of the carpark and cycle trails.

In the event of this development being approved, are the proposed additional passing places likely to be in place before any construction actually commences?

It was also stated at the meeting that the 2 x 4X4 transport vehicles would be taking the cyclists and cycles to the top of the hill every 15 minutes. What procedures are in place to stop erosion on the steep gradient of the track leading to the top of the hill i.e. drop off point?

I also have concerns regarding the wildlife in the area with their breeding sites being disturbed on a daily basis due to the extra activity on the hill. We have some of the rarest birds of prey in the United Kingdom in the area and I would hate to see their numbers dwindling again due to this development taking place. Has there been a

Badger, Pine Martin or Red Squirrel survey done on the proposed site to safeguard their wellbeing?

It was stated at the meeting by the GNE representative that this project would increase property values in the area. How can they justify this bold statement? In my opinion it will devalue our properties simply because of the additional vehicular movement, noise pollution, environmental pollution and inconvenience to all in the local area.

I urge you to carefully consider these points before making a decision regarding this site.

Kind Regards

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
 To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
 Subject: FW: GNE Pitfichie/Monymusk Mountain Bike Development Application
 Date: 15 September 2026 16:24:14

Dear Sirs,

[REDACTED] historic 16th century Pitfichie Castle, looking out on Bennachie and the River Don. I am completely against your application.

[REDACTED] the 8-year restoration to Pitfichie Castle, bringing an irremediable ruin to its noble rebirth in an area of remote beauty unspoilt for 600 years. The castle restoration had great support from the people of Monymusk and I believe this highlights the vested interest of the local community in preserving this area.

My strong objection to your mountain biking application, is that it would introduce commercial development completely alien to this location of remote beauty, which the National Trust once offered to make a conservation area.

The constant traffic of the uplift vehicles would destroy the peacefulness and tranquillity of the area and hamper residents use of access roads. The development of the car park would endanger the private water supply sourced in the forest – supplying Pitfichie Castle and other properties. If this supply was damaged – who would be responsible?

All of us who care deeply for this area have a responsibility to make a definite refusal to this application.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie Hill - Gravitare NE CAT
Date: 15 September 2026 17:51:39

Dear FLS,

I'd like to express my personal support for the CAT for the Gravitare project.

[REDACTED] I have seen first hand the positive effects mountain bike trails have had on the local community and Aberdeenshire as a whole.

This project offers something different to Tarland Trails with uplift and downhill trails providing another facility to complement those already making Aberdeenshire a destination.

Thanks

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Cc: secretarycmmcc@gmail.com
Subject: Pitfichie Hill bike trails and car park: Objection
Date: 15 September 2026 21:38:22

I object to this development because of the proposed motorised uplift. The plan involves two uplift vehicles, each making 3 round trips per hour; therefore continuous noise and disturbance. This will have an adverse effect of other forest users and wildlife. I am also concerned about the environmental impact of the CO2 emissions from this level of motorised uplift. The application includes no attempt to justify the adverse environmental impact of motorised uplift. There is no environmental impact statement. The biodiversity statement only mentions potential improvements; completely fails to consider the negative biodiversity impact of continuous vehicle traffic and CO2 emissions.

Tarland Trails operates successfully without motorised uplift; how is it justified here?

I live [REDACTED] and visit to enjoy walking, running and wildlife, often travelling by bike to get there!

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: secretarycmmcc@gmail.com
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: CMMCC Objection - Pitfichie Asset Transfer Request
Date: 16 September 2026 12:41:01
Attachments: [FOP's objection to Planning Application.pdf](#)
[Referenced Objections Comments.pdf](#)

Dear Sir/Madam,

Cluny, Midmar and Monymusk Community Council wish to OBJECT to this application, a position confirmed via a public vote of Community Councillors at the public meeting in Midmar Hall on Wednesday 9th Sept.

Upon review of evidenced representations sent to the community council by local residents, and after much discussion and own research, a majority of members of the Community Council are persuaded that there are a significant number of material planning concerns and knowledge gaps in the documents submitted in support of the proposal.

These require proper assessment and resolution before any thought is given by Forestry and Land Scotland to approving this application.

Rather than repeat here the detailed arguments, we would like to point you to the discussions and pertinent questions given in the attached documents which summarise well the concerns some Community Council members have.

Individual community councillors may also decide to contact you via a separate submission to express their own personal view on the application.

Regards

[REDACTED]

Secretary

Cluny, Midmar and Monymusk Community Council

Website = <https://cmmcommunitycouncil.org/>

Facebook Site = <https://www.facebook.com/groups/738161263007490>

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FRIENDS OF PITFICHIE

OBJECTION TO PLANNING APPLICATION

Proposed downhill mountain-biking centre, Pitfichie Hill, near Monymusk

Applicant: Gravitare North East (GNE)

Planning application reference: (APP/2026/1295)

Date: 01/09/26

Objector: Friends of Pitfichie (FOP)

1. Purpose of this objection

Friends of Pitfichie (FOP) is an organisation concerned with the protection of the natural environment, wildlife and heritage of the area in and around Monymusk.

FOP **objects** to the above planning application. FOP is not opposed to mountain biking as an activity and recognises the recreational benefits of cycling. The objection is to this particular development at this location and to the scale and intensity of the proposed facility, including the new engineered trails, visitor facilities, car parking, vehicle uplift operation, event activity and the resulting traffic and environmental impacts.

This representation has been prepared from FOP's earlier detailed response to GNE's Community Asset Transfer request and the accompanying Traffic Analysis dated 15 August 2026. It recasts the issues in planning terms and focuses on matters capable of being material considerations in the determination of a planning application.

FOP asks the Council to assess the proposal against the development plan as a whole, including National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2023 (ALDP), and to refuse permission because the adverse effects identified below are not demonstrated to be avoided, adequately mitigated or outweighed by the benefits claimed.

2. General overview

- The proposal would generate a substantial new traffic demand on an access route that is narrow, largely single track and subject to limited passing provision, surface-water problems and regular agricultural use.
- Traffic would pass through the historic core of Monymusk, past a primary school and play area and along a route which includes a core path. The resulting effects on road safety, pedestrian amenity, noise, congestion and the character of the village require a robust assessment.

- The applicant's 20,000 visitors per year assumption requires proper evidence and sensitivity testing. FOP's traffic analysis indicates materially higher visitor numbers are plausible and that peak-period vehicle movements could be substantially greater than the annual average.
- The proposed motorised uplift operation is fundamental to the development but its full route, frequency, interaction with walkers and cyclists, speed regime and effects on amenity, access, erosion and safety are not sufficiently demonstrated in the material seen by FOP.
- The site lies within the Bennachie Special Landscape Area. The proposed engineered trails, parking, toilets, signage and associated infrastructure would introduce a more intensive and urbanised recreational character into a sensitive rural landscape.
- The ecological baseline is not sufficiently robust for the scale and nature of the proposal. The Preliminary Ecological Assessment was based on a single January 2026 field visit, while the proposal would create continuing operational disturbance, including organised events.
- The application needs to demonstrate positive effects for biodiversity and to address cumulative impacts on habitats, protected and notable species, drainage, erosion, woodland, soil biota and nearby sensitive sites. Future aspirations should not substitute for quantified and enforceable mitigation.
- The development would materially intensify recreational use and could create conflict between motorised uplift operations and walkers, horse riders, families and other cyclists using the forest.
- Parking and event-management arrangements need to demonstrate that overspill parking, campervans, trailers and event traffic can be accommodated without displacement onto verges, passing places, private accesses or other sensitive .
- Taken cumulatively, these impacts mean that the proposal has not demonstrated an acceptable relationship with its rural setting, transport infrastructure, natural environment, existing recreational use and nearby community.

3. Development plan and policy framework

The Council's current Local Development Plan is the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2023. NPF4 forms part of the development plan and must be read as a whole. The policies most directly engaged by the issues raised in this objection include:

NPF4 Policy 1 — Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises. Planning decisions should give significant weight to the climate and nature crises.

NPF4 Policy 3 — Biodiversity. Development should contribute to biodiversity enhancement, minimise adverse and cumulative impacts and strengthen nature networks where relevant.

NPF4 Policy 4 — Natural Places. Development which, by virtue of its type, location or scale, would have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment is not supported.

NPF4 Policy 5 — Soils. Relevant to disturbance of organic/heathland soils, erosion and the need to protect soil resources.

NPF4 Policy 6 — Forestry, Woodland and Trees. Relevant to woodland, landscape, biodiversity, public access, hydrology and forestry interests.

NPF4 Policy 13 — Sustainable Transport. Requires the transport requirements generated by development to be considered against the sustainable travel and investment hierarchies and appropriate safety/access requirements.

NPF4 Policy 14 — Design, Quality and Place. Relevant to whether the development makes a positive contribution to sense of place and respects local character.

NPF4 Policy 20 — Blue and Green Infrastructure. Relevant to the protection and enhancement of connected natural infrastructure and long-term management.

NPF4 Policy 21 — Play, Recreation and Sport. Relevant to the provision of recreation and sport, but must be considered alongside impacts on other users and the natural environment.

NPF4 Policy 22 — Flood Risk and Water Management. Relevant to drainage, runoff, surface water and development design.

ALDP Policy P1 — Layout, Siting and Design. Relevant to layout, siting, design and the Council's requirement for biodiversity enhancement proportionate to the development.

ALDP Policy E1 — Natural Heritage. Relevant to sites of nature conservation interest, important habitats, protected species and wildlife in the wider countryside.

4. Transport, access and road safety

4.1. The proposed development depends on an access arrangement which is materially constrained. FOP's site observations record a 1.3 mile single-track dead-end road between Pitfichie crossroads and the forestry entrance. The carriageway is approximately 3 metres wide and has three official passing places plus two unofficial passing areas. The road also serves 17 households and is used for regular agricultural traffic. FOP has recorded deteriorating edges, many potholes and surface-water problems, including substantial longitudinal surface water after heavy rainfall. See **Traffic Analysis separate appendix.**  **Traffic Analysis.**

Within Monymusk, the principal route from the B993 passes through the village square, past the play park and primary school and along a road which forms part of a popular core path. FOP's Traffic Analysis records that Council traffic measurements of 4,378 two-way vehicle movements over the measurement period in May 2024, equivalent to an average of approximately 313 vehicles in one direction per day past the school.

4.2. FOP also undertook vehicle observations on the single-track access road in April and May 2026. Recordings were made with a 'wildlife camera' mounted next to the single track road up to Rorandle. The two measurement periods produced very similar results: exactly 46 and 45 vehicles per day travelling uphill in the measurement period, with 89 and 85 vehicles respectively over the relevant weekends. These measurements indicate that the proposed development would introduce a substantial change to the existing traffic pattern on a constrained road.

4.3. The Council's Roads Service should independently test the applicant's traffic assumptions, including peak season, weekend and event conditions, rather than relying solely on annualised visitor averages. FOP's analysis uses 75% single-occupancy vehicle travel, an average occupancy of 1.375 persons per vehicle, seasonality and a strong weekend bias (based on statistics at Glentress which also has an uplift system). On that basis, 20,000 annual visitors correspond to approximately 14,550 vehicle arrivals per year,

with an indicative peak-season weekend average of approximately 115 vehicle arrivals. The GNE analysis also models materially higher visitor levels

Passing places — ownership and deliverability.

4.4. Before any proposed additional passing places are relied upon as mitigation, FOP asks Roads Development and the Planning Authority to establish the lateral extent of the land required for each passing place, including any verge or adjoining land required for widening, and to confirm the ownership or other relevant land interest affecting that land. The council should then satisfy itself that the applicant has sufficient ownership, agreement or other control to construct and retain each proposed passing place. A mitigation measure should not be relied upon in determining the application unless its physical and legal deliverability has been established. FOP also asks Roads Development to identify the design vehicle against which the existing and proposed passing arrangements have been assessed. This road carries established agricultural and forestry traffic. The relevant assessment should therefore consider interaction between development traffic and representative agricultural and forestry vehicles rather than merely whether two ordinary passenger cars can pass. Where necessary, swept-path analysis should be provided for the proposed passing places.

4.5. The fact that the applicant forecasts 20,000 visitors does not establish that 20,000 is an appropriate upper-bound for transport assessment. FOP notes that Tarland trails have recorded approximately 40,000 visitors annually despite having similar overall trail length and no uplift vehicles.



The comparison is not presented as proof that Pitfichie will receive 40,000 visitors, but as a reason why the transport assessment should be sensitivity-tested above the applicant's central forecast.

4.6. Five organised competitive weekend events are also proposed. FOP's evidence records previous Pitfichie events attracting approximately 250–300 competitors, together with supporters and spectators. The application needs to demonstrate how event traffic, parking, overnight stays, trailers and associated movements can be accommodated on the existing network without creating unacceptable road-safety, congestion or amenity effects. For this there will have to be alternative parking which must be identified in writing.

5. Parking, overspill and event management

5.1. The proposed car park is stated in the material reviewed by FOP to have capacity for approximately 75–76 cars. FOP considers that capacity must be assessed against the actual operational model, including riders arriving with bicycles, trailers, campervans, event vehicles, loading and unloading requirements and the possibility of spectators and non-riding

visitors. Account should also be taken of the need to accommodate horse riders with horse-boxes.

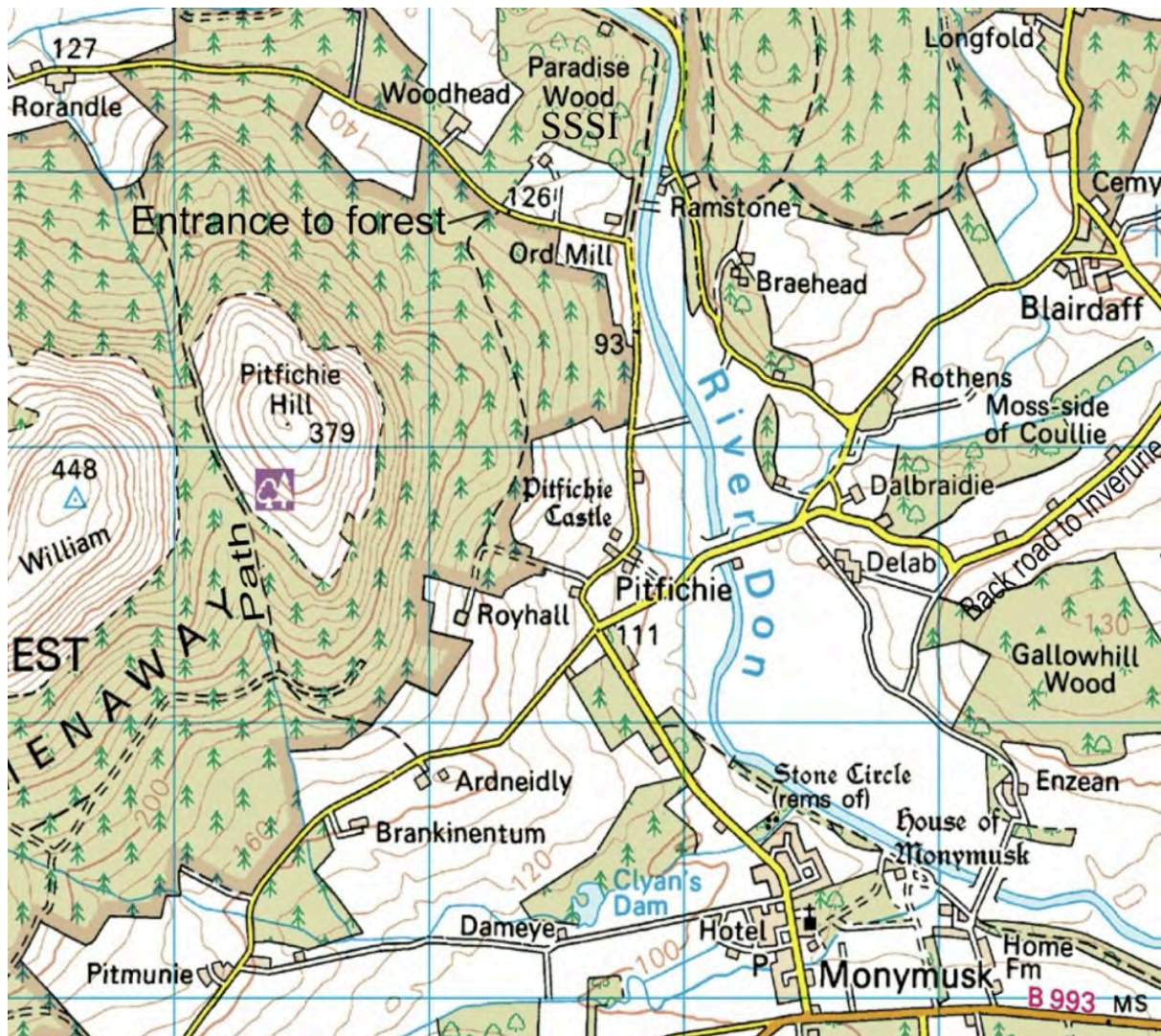
5.2. A parking cap is only effective if there is a credible and enforceable means of preventing overspill. FOP has raised concerns that charging for parking can displace vehicles onto verges and lay-bys where road space is constrained. The Council should therefore require a demonstrated parking-management and enforcement system covering full-car-park conditions and event days, not simply rely on the nominal capacity of the proposed car park.

5.3. The proposal should also make clear whether campervans are excluded from overnight use, how event participants will be accommodated, and where event vehicles and trailers will be parked. These are land-use and transport matters because unmanaged overspill could directly affect road safety, public access, landscape and residential and village amenity.

6. Motorised uplift operation and recreational conflict

6.1. The motorised uplift operation is not a minor ancillary matter; it is central to the proposed business model and to the forecast visitor experience. On the maps that GNE have submitted there is no indication as to the precise route that motorised uplift vehicles will take en route from the pick up point to the top of the hill. Following a request by FOP for clarification of the route, FOP has subsequently received information (email from GNE via the CC 25/08/2026) that the proposed uplift vehicle route initially follows a forestry road from the car park before turning right, North West of Ardneidly, and heading up the Northerly path to the bealach between Pitfichie Hill and Cairn William. FOP therefore asks that a definitive plan of the complete uplift route is provided so that the planning authority and relevant consultees can assess the operation actually proposed. This path to the bealach is steep and narrow with a loose natural surface. Historically this has always been a walking path but is now shared with cyclists. FOP records the path as approximately 1.6 to 1.9 metres wide in places and identifies existing erosion and sediment runoff. Regular use by four-wheeled vehicles would introduce a materially different use of the route and would increase erosion, sediment movement and risks to walkers and cyclists.

Map 1. Showing the path over the bealach, the neighbouring SSSI of Paradise Wood and the village of Monymusk and back road to Inverurie.



The route in question is a long-established walking path to which the earliest reference is on the 1799 John Innes map. (National Records of Scotland RHP/245 RHP/1895) and it is still marked as a walking path on today's OS map. Several within the community of Monymusk can testify to the fact that, in living memory, this has always been a walking path.

6.2. The applicant should identify any widening, surfacing, drainage, reinforcement, vegetation clearance, passing or turning provision, or other engineering works required to make this route suitable for the proposed uplift operation. Any such works should form part of the development assessed by the planning authority rather than being left undefined until subsequent operational implementation. However, is the applicant aware that the intended route for motorised vehicles is in a Protected Drinking Water Catchment area with associated SEPA regulations?



This is the point at which the path to the bealach leaves the forest road. The sign on the left indicates that this is also part of a cycling route.



The two shoes give some indication as to the width of the path. A shoe measures 32cms. The path at that point was 6 shoes width ie 1.92m wide. The path varies from about 1.6m to 1.9m





The above photos show the degree of erosion on the path and the key fob is simply to demonstrate the size of gravel silt that is washed down.



This is a view of the path looking downhill.

6.3. The application should specify vehicle type, dimensions, operating frequency, speed, passing arrangements, driver procedures, pedestrian priority, conflict-management measures and hours of operation. The width of the path gives no room for both vehicles, walkers and cyclists. The gradient of the path is such that there would be considerable increased erosion if it was used as a regular route for 4x4 vehicles pulling trailers. There should be no assumption that a low maximum speed alone resolves the safety and amenity issue. FOP has also identified inconsistent speed assumptions in the material previously reviewed, with 10 mph/16 km/h used in one context and 15 mph stated in the Site Operation Plan.

6.4. Given that FLS state they have incomplete mapping of Private Water Supplies (personal communication email 27/04/26) and with the potential for increased erosion and sediment deposition, what measures have GNE taken to ensure that private water supplies especially those supplied by the Protected Drinking Water Area of the Pitmunie burn are not affected?

6.5. The track up to the bealach is in a Protected Drinking Water Area.

6.6. Regular motorised traffic on tracks which are currently and traditionally used for walking, cycling and horse riding would materially change the character of the recreational environment. The assessment must consider the effect on walkers, horse riders, families, dog walkers and cyclists, not simply whether physical access remains technically possible.

7. Landscape, visual impact and local character

7.1. Pitfichie Hill is within the Bennachie Special Landscape Area. The proposal would introduce a concentration of engineered trails, signage, parking, toilets and visitor infrastructure into a landscape currently experienced as a forest and hill recreational environment.

7.2. FOP is particularly concerned that the proposed car park and toileting facilities would be visible from not only the road but also from Bennachie and other high spots along the range. Unlike the carpark at Essons at Bennachie, no tree barriers are planned within the parking area to hide the sight of a carpark. Even if trees are to be planted around the perimeter of the car park, it will be many years before they act as an effective screen. The upper climb or push-up trail is also proposed across open heathland and shallow organic soils.

7.3. The final alignment appears, from the material previously reviewed, to remain partly deferred within a broad corridor. This makes it difficult to assess the final landscape and visual effect at the point of determination.

7.3. The Council should therefore assess the cumulative visual effect of the entire proposal rather than considering individual trail sections in isolation. The relevant question is whether the development, by virtue of its scale, engineering, visitor infrastructure and intensity of use, would preserve the special qualities and character of the landscape.

8. Biodiversity, habitats, soils and water

8.1. The ecological evidence requires careful scrutiny. The Preliminary Ecological Assessment is dated February 2026 with the field study undertaken on 20th. January 2026, in winter conditions with snow on the ground. The report itself identifies limitations associated with survey timing and conditions. FOP therefore does not consider the January visit, by itself, a sufficiently comprehensive ecological baseline for all species and habitats potentially affected by a development of this nature.

Particular issues requiring resolution include seasonal reptile survey work, breeding bird assessment, migrant birds and raptors, protected and notable species, pine marten records, proximity to sensitive woodland, the close proximity of an SSSI in the form of Paradise Woods and the potential effects of repeated event disturbance. FOP's evidence also identifies concern regarding at least one Schedule 1 raptor and other Schedule 1 species occurring in the wider forest. These matters should be addressed by competent ecological assessment rather than treated as matters capable of being resolved solely by a pre-construction nesting-bird check.

8.2. The proposal also requires assessment of upland heathland, shallow organic soils, erosion, drainage and sediment runoff. The construction of a new upper climb/push-up route through an area of undisturbed heather moorland is particularly important. The applicant should demonstrate the extent of soil disturbance, peat/organic soil impacts, drainage design and how runoff will be prevented from causing downstream effects and groundwater geochemical changes. It is noted that in the Aberdeenshire Special Landscape Area document, open heather moorland is afforded special recognition.

8.3. The Biodiversity Plan should not be treated as establishing a net biodiversity benefit merely because it contains future aspirations such as habitat management, wetland measures, bird and bat boxes and woodland improvements. Under NPF4 Policy 3 and ALDP Policy P1, the Council should be satisfied that biodiversity effects have been properly identified and that proposed enhancement is proportionate, additional, deliverable and capable of being monitored and maintained. It is noted that there are inconsistencies in GNE's application as to both the area of land and the scope of management for which GNE are applying to rent from FLS. Clarification is required to know precisely where they intend to manage biodiversity.

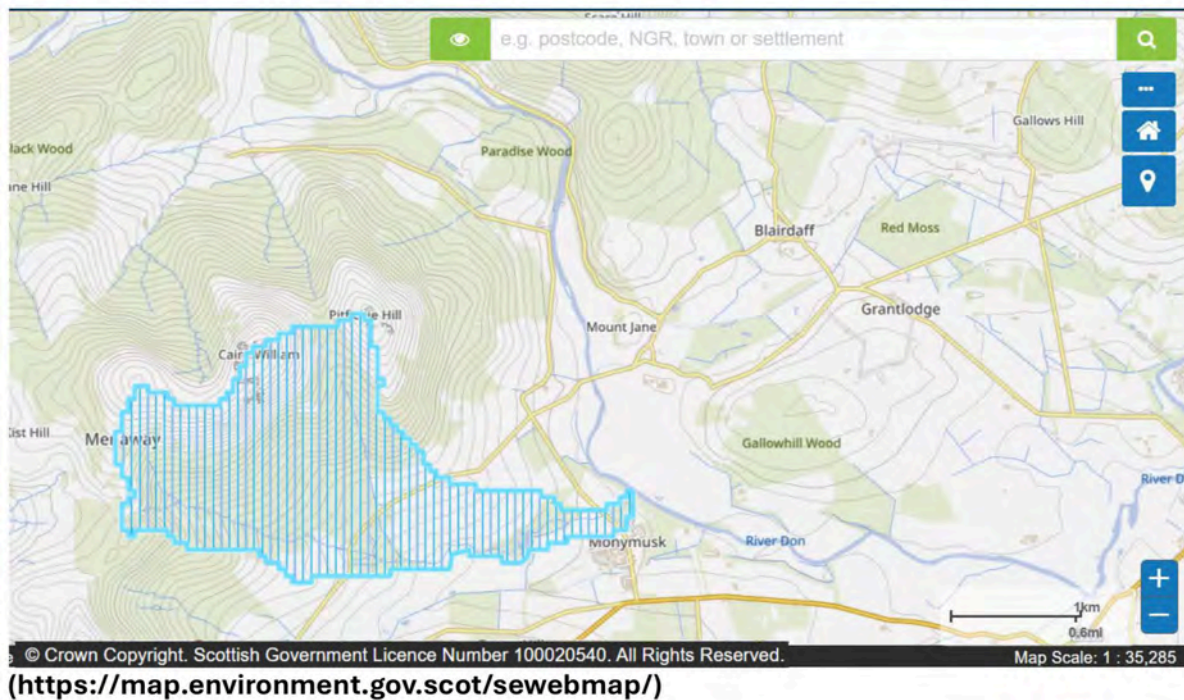
8.4. FOP also asks the Council to consider cumulative effects, including increased visitor numbers, five organised events each year, year-round recreational use, vehicle movements, unofficial trail activity and the proximity of sensitive habitats and Paradise Woods SSSI.

8.5. Have GNE located all groundwater dependent terrestrial ecosystems (GDTE).

8.5 Evidence as to how GNE are to fulfill the Ecological Offsite Mitigation for the loss of woodland area of the car park area.

8.6 Many households around Pitfichie Hill and within Monymusk itself have drinking water sources on Pitfichie Hill and Cairn William. The map below indicates the Protected Drinking Water Catchment Area for water flowing into Pitfichie burn. Part of the trails that GNE want to build fall within this catchment area and, in particular, the intended route on which GNE's motorised vehicles may run is also on this protected area. What regulations are there to ensure the safeguarding of both this designated area of water protection and also of individual Private Water Supplies?

Map 2. Protected Drinking Water Area.



8.7 FLS maps of private water supplies on Pitfichie Hill have inaccuracies. FLS themselves are aware of this. This is an email dated 27/04/26 from FLS following FOP's letter re errors of mapping water sources

"The Land Management Plan for Pitfichie and Corrennie operates on a 10-year review cycle and is scheduled for revision next year. As part of this process, the FLS Planner will consult with all immediate neighbours and properties believed to be on a private water supply. If you're in contact with your neighbours and they wish to confirm the location & details of their supply with FLS in advance of the plan review, please encourage them to contact us at this email address. They should provide a grid reference and brief description of the supply type (e.g. borehole, well, spring), and we can update our mapping database Best regards, | **Forest Planner** Forestry and Land Scotland, East Region."

SEPA's document **Guidance on Assessing the Impacts of Developments on Groundwater Abstractions**: "Developers are responsible for obtaining the relevant information required to support the impact assessment and for designing and undertaking the site works in accordance with the relevant regulations and published guidance. SEPA expect the assessments to be undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced specialists."

9. Historic environment and Monymusk village character

9.1. The traffic consequences of the development are not confined to highway capacity. The main approach from the B993 means that the majority of traffic passes through the village and is therefore constrained by the village square and road layout. Passage through the village is, for much of the part, single file due to the width of the road and parked cars. (See Appendix: Traffic Analysis)

9.2. Historic Environment Scotland's designation record for the Monymusk designed landscape identifies the historical interest as 'outstanding'.

9.3. Increased traffic, noise, parking pressure and increased visitor activity through the village en route to the downhill centre are relevant to the assessment of character, amenity and the historic environment. The Council should consider whether the cumulative effect of the development's transport demand would erode the qualities that contribute to the setting and character of the village. It should be noted that Monymusk is a tourist attraction in itself with its A listed 12th century church and planned village with listed buildings around the village square.

9.4 Monymusk has a very strong sense of place (NP4 14). Both its architecture and designed landscape contribute to how people experience and connect with a sense of pride and social cohesion. The appealing scale of the buildings is at odds with the village itself being used as a thoroughfare.

10. Recreation, access and public amenity

10.1. Pitfichie Forest is already used by walkers, horse riders, families, cyclists and other recreational users. FOP accepts the legitimacy of mountain biking but objects to the proposition that an increase in facilities for one activity necessarily represents a net recreational benefit if it materially reduces the quality, safety or confidence of other users.

10.2. There are already 20km of cycling tracks including downhill trails on and around Pitfichie Hill and Cairn William which are popular with cyclists of all abilities.

10.3. The proposed uplift operation is particularly relevant because repeated motorised movements would occur on routes shared with other users with paths that are 1.6 to 1.9 metres wide. The planning assessment should address how conflicts will be prevented, how users will be given priority where appropriate, and whether regular vehicle movements will cause displacement from routes currently used for quieter recreation.

10.4 Users of the forest do not currently experience diesel or petrol emissions and associated impact on respiration. The financial model presented by GNE suggests the use of diesel 4x4s. This would introduce emissions detrimental to the 'sense of place' for users of the forest.

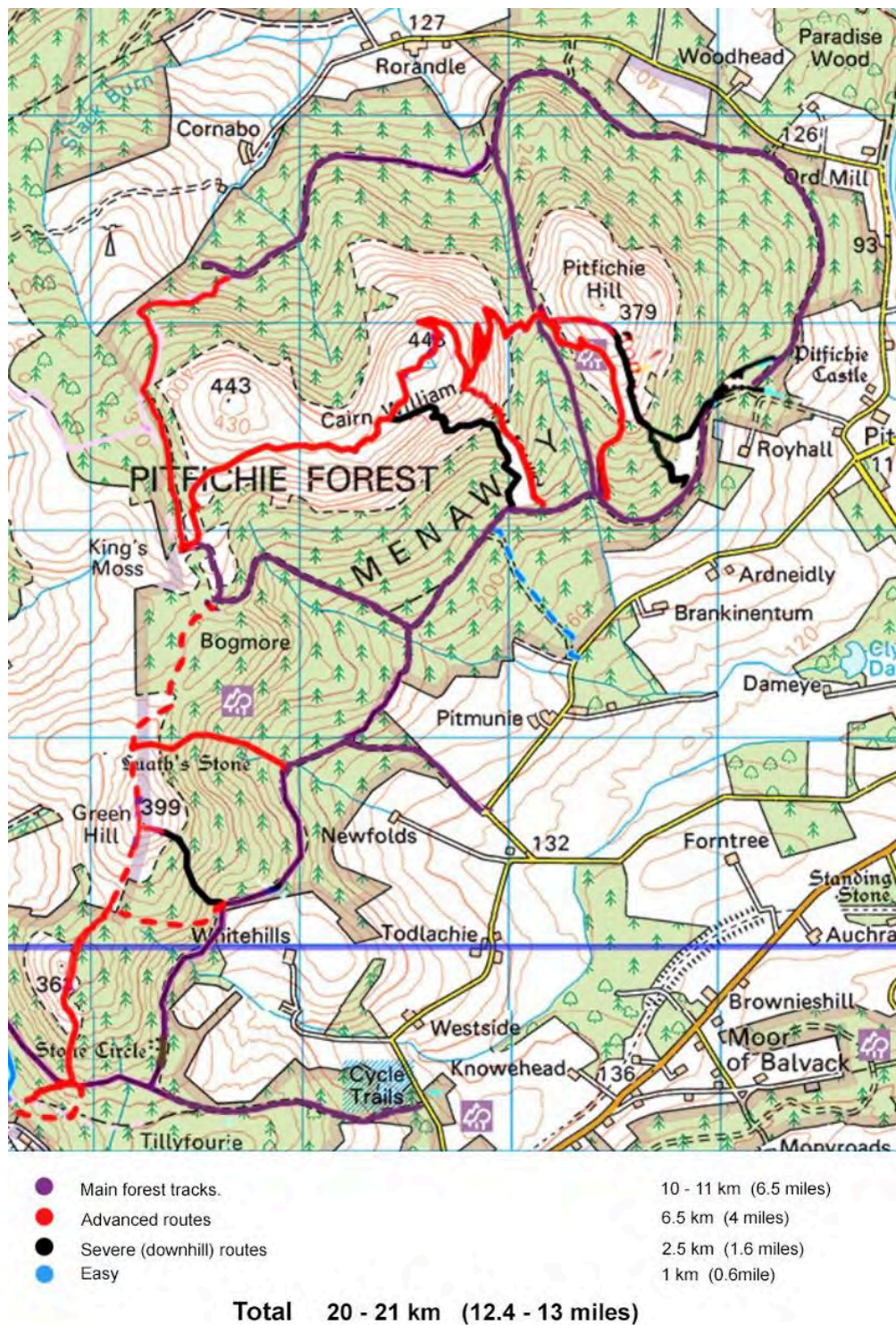
10.5. The core path from the village up to Clyans dam and down to the river bank via the section of 60mph road has no footpath. This is a popular route for walkers, mothers and children and runners. Increased traffic will potentially increase risk to pedestrians.

10.5. The Council should consider the existence of approximately 20km of existing cycling trails at Pitfichie and the claimed need for a purpose-built downhill centre with uplift vehicles. The planning balance should consider the incremental benefit of the proposed facility against its incremental environmental, transport and amenity impacts.

Local Community Wealth Building.

10.6 What evidence has GNE produced to show how the local community will gain financially from the development?

Map 3. Cycling trails on Pitfichie Hill and Cairn William.



11. Need for further information before determination

FOP considers that the application should not be determined until the following matters have been satisfactorily resolved:

- A full transport assessment/technical note addressing peak-season and weekend traffic, event days, visitor sensitivity above 20,000 per year and the cumulative effect on Monymusk and the single-track access road.
- A clear plan showing the complete motorised uplift route, including the upper climb section, with details of vehicle type, dimensions, frequency, speed, passing arrangements, user-conflict controls and physical works required to make the confirmed route suitable for uplift vehicles.
- A robust parking and event-management plan addressing full-car-park conditions, overspill, campervans, trailers, spectators, event vehicles and overnight accommodation.
- A landscape and visual assessment proportionate to the sensitivity of the Special Landscape Area and the visibility of the car park, toilets, trails and signage.
- A suitably comprehensive ecological baseline, including seasonal survey work where required, protected/notable species, breeding birds, reptiles, habitats and cumulative operational disturbance.
- Detailed drainage, soil and erosion information for the engineered trails and upper climb/push-up route, including construction and operational maintenance measures.
- A clear biodiversity metric or other transparent method demonstrating how proposed enhancement will achieve a genuine positive effect after accounting for development impacts and mitigation.
- Clear, enforceable measures for event noise, tannoys/PA systems, lighting or night riding, litter, behaviour, access and disturbance to other users.
- Confirmation of the exact development footprint, trail alignments and rights of access. Furthermore, that land required for passing places on the access road or other infrastructure should have precise dimensions and position as well as having ownership confirmed.

12. Planning balance and conclusion

FOP recognises that the proposal may provide recreational and economic benefits for some users and that mountain biking can contribute positively to tourism. Those benefits, however, do not remove the need to demonstrate that the development is appropriately located, designed and serviced and that its impacts on transport, road safety, landscape, biodiversity, soils, water, heritage, recreation and local amenity are acceptable.

The evidence available to FOP identifies a combination of unresolved issues rather than a single isolated objection. The proposed development would intensify activity at a sensitive rural location; generate additional traffic through a historic village and along a constrained single-track road; introduce regular motorised uplift movements into a shared recreational environment; and create new engineered infrastructure in a Special Landscape Area with potentially significant ecological and soil implications.

In FOP's view, the application has not demonstrated that these effects can be adequately avoided or mitigated, nor that the claimed benefits outweigh the identified adverse effects. The Council should therefore refuse the application. Alternatively, if the Council considers that further information could in principle resolve the issues, the application should not be approved until the outstanding information and assessments identified above have been provided, independently scrutinised where appropriate, and shown to comply with the development plan.

13. Evidence relied upon

- Friends of Pitfichie, Response to the Gravitare North East Community Asset Transfer Request, Pitfichie Hill, near Monymusk.
- Friends of Pitfichie, Analysis of Traffic, dated 15 August 2026.
- Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2023 and associated planning guidance.
- National Planning Framework 4.
- Aberdeenshire Council planning advice on baseline ecological surveys and securing positive effects for biodiversity and Aberdeenshire document on Special Landscape Area.
- Historic Environment Scotland designation information for Monymusk Designed Landscape (GDL00289)

OBJECTION COMMENT 1

I wish to formally object to the proposed asset transfer application by Gravitare North East (GNE) relating to Pitfichie Hill.

Having reviewed the submitted documentation, I do not believe the proposal demonstrates that the development is financially viable, environmentally acceptable, socially beneficial or capable of being managed sustainably in the long term. There are substantial gaps, unsupported assumptions and unresolved risks throughout the application. Deficiencies with the application are presented below.

1. No Exit Strategy, Decommissioning Plan or Protection for the Public Finances

The application does not provide detail on decommissioning, restoration or an exit strategy should the project cease at any stage.

The proposal requires c. £1.1m of public funding, however no information is provided regarding:

- What happens if visitor numbers fail to materialise.
- What happens if the uplift service is not commercially viable.
- What happens if public funding is reduced.
- What happens if the charity ceases trading.
- Who would be responsible for removing infrastructure.
- Who would pay for restoring trails, parking facilities, signage, toilets and associated infrastructure.
- Who carries long-term environmental liabilities.
- How are private water supplies monitored
- What happens in the event of a vehicle oil spill
- In the event of a fire, which is foreseeable given the number of vehicles and DIY van conversions, how this will be managed and provisions to deal with a wildfire in the forest. The area is already identified as high risk.
- No information regarding the cost of emergency service mobilisations and the cost to the public of these - mountain biking is a dangerous sport with many serious injuries likely every year
- Increased cost of maintenance on the single-track road which is weak, unsupported and totally unsuitable for a high volume of vans
- There is no emergency response plan in the proposal either and no agreements with the emergency services and local land owners to agree on where and how a rescue would take place
- No evidence is provided of discussions and agreements with emergency services in the event of a serious injury, accident or forest fire.

Who would pay costs associated with the above? The business case itself acknowledges uncertainty regarding visitor numbers, operating costs and uplift demand, yet no contingency arrangements have been provided. **It is wholly unacceptable to seek over £1 million in public investment without a clearly defined exit strategy. The public appears to assume all of the downside risk while the applicant carries little demonstrable risk.**

2. The Financial Case is Weak, Unproven and Based on Optimistic Assumptions

The proposal seeks £1.1 million in capital funding despite **only a very small proportion of that funding being secured**. The business model depends almost entirely on:

- Car parking income.
- Uplift vehicle income.
- Grant funding.
- Volunteer support.
- Forecast visitor numbers.

However, the application does not adequately explain:

- Whether 20,000 visitors is a conservative, central or optimistic estimate.
- The uncertainty associated with visitor forecasts.
- The effect of lower visitor numbers.
- The impact of adverse weather and number of days per year lost due to adverse weather (annually there will be at least 50 days due to snow and ice where it is not possible to operate uplift vehicles, and a significant number of days with poor weather where visitor numbers will be very low)
- The impact of forestry operations and felling.
- The impact of economic downturns or cost of living pressures.
- The impact of event cancellations.
- The impact of declining mountain biking participation.
- The impact of increasing maintenance and operating costs.
- The impact of failing to secure sponsorship and commercial partnerships.
- The impact of vandalism, theft or vehicle replacement costs.

It is particularly concerning that costs such as finance, administration, vehicle depreciation and long-term replacement do not appear to increase in a realistic manner despite inflation, increased activity and ageing infrastructure. The proposal assumes riders will regularly pay approximately £35 per day for uplift. For regular users this could amount to well over £1,500 per year. **There is no evidence that**

sufficient numbers of riders will pay these costs over the long term. This is particularly pertinent given the cost-of-living crisis. **The application repeatedly refers to uncertainty in visitor numbers and uplift viability while simultaneously relying upon these assumptions to justify the development - this is not a robust business case.**

3. Biodiversity, Ecology, Water Environment and Environmental Risks Have Not Been Properly Assessed

The environmental information provided is wholly inadequate for a development of this scale. The proposal contains aspirational statements regarding biodiversity enhancement but provides little evidence to support them. Major concerns include:

- No meaningful biodiversity baseline.
- Insufficient protected species assessment.
- Failure to properly address private water supplies.
- No meaningful hydrological assessment.
- No runoff modelling.
- No assessment of trail erosion impacts.
- No assessment of contamination risks from vehicles.
- No assessment of contamination from bike maintenance activities.
- No adequate assessment of vehicle leaks, fuels or oils.
- No detailed information regarding toilet servicing and waste management.
- Limited environmental survey work.
- Reliance on a survey undertaken during winter conditions.

The proposal states that water features and seepage areas will be mapped and avoided. This is particularly concerning because it demonstrates such areas have not yet been comprehensively identified. The application therefore asks decision makers to approve development before understanding what environmental constraints exist. That approach is fundamentally backwards and there is no clear explanation regarding

- How protected species will be managed if discovered near trails.
- What operational restrictions may be required.
- The financial implications of these restrictions.
- What monitoring will be undertaken and the qualifications of those undertaking monitoring
- What corrective action will be taken if environmental harm is identified.

No member of GNE appears to possess specialist expertise in ecology, hydrology or environmental management and no evidence has been provided of specialist professionals being retained to oversee these matters and provide independent advice. There are schedule 1 protected species that inhabit Pitfichie Hill.

There is also no discussion on climate impacts associated with the developments construction, ongoing operation, maintenance or vehicle travel to the site - i.e., CO2e and pollutant emissions.

4. Community Support Has Been Significantly Overstated and is Misleading

The application repeatedly presents itself as a community-led development. However, the evidence supplied does not demonstrate widespread community support. GNE refers to:

- Social media followers.
- Photographs of events.
- Volunteer activity.
- Supportive comments from mountain bikers.

None of these represent evidence of broad community support and the GNE survey does not confirm where those who responded live. Most concerning is survey evidence where, despite being heavily weighted towards mountain biking interests, GNE's own consultation generated only a small number of responses and limited support (less than 50%). The proposal identifies through the above channels, GNE have an audience of thousands, however only 80 responded to the mountain biking survey. In contrast, an objective local community survey generated significantly greater participation (c. 250 responses) and demonstrated overwhelming opposition (c. 90%) to the development. The application therefore appears to place greater weight on the views of a relatively small mountain biking community than on the broader views of local residents who will live with the consequences of the development. There is also evidence that questions raised by residents were not fully answered, only a minority of submitted questions received responses and public engagement has been selective rather than comprehensive.

5. Serious Traffic and Road Safety Concerns

The local road network is entirely unsuitable for the level of traffic proposed. The roads serving Pitfichie Hill are narrow, weak in places, poorly aligned, have dangerous junctions, are unsuitable for increased vehicle traffic (especially large vans used by mountain bikers) and totally unsuitable for large scale events - this has been demonstrated on several occasions where due to events and the increased road usage, near misses have occurred with children cycling on roads and dangerous driving instances due to the local road layout.

The suggestion that traffic impacts are adequately understood is misleading. There have already been reports of vehicles parking in lay-bys, parking conflicts, near misses and dangerous manoeuvres. These incidents occurred during recent events. No demonstration has been made the traffic impacts have been quantified and no swept path analysis has been undertaken.

The proposal assumes visitor numbers of approximately 20,000 per year. However, there is no convincing evidence which supports this figure. Traffic impacts under normal operating conditions have not been adequately assessed and surveys undertaken during race events do not provide a reliable representation of day-to-day operations. The proposal also refers to creating passing places, however the land ownership of where these would be built is unclear, they have not been mapped, existing underground utilities/services may be impacted, technical feasibility not demonstrated and there is no evidence of agreements in place for passing places. The application cannot be approved until this has been resolved and matters understood in full. In addition, increased traffic will be routed through an area used by local families and school children. There appears to have been little meaningful engagement regarding these impacts. There is also no evidence provided of traffic impacts on neighbouring villages and towns, where traffic will increase significantly. It is clear that the development is not appropriate given the local road infrastructure and increasing traffic will only result in the likelihood of a serious accident and potential fatality - it is unacceptable to increase this risk.

6. The Claimed Economic Benefits Are Unproven and Misleading

The proposal repeatedly claims that the development will generate economic growth and tourism. However, no evidence has been provided that this represents genuinely new economic activity. Instead, the proposal appears far more likely to represent economic displacement. Many visitors are likely to come from Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire and existing mountain biking communities. This is not tourism growth and is simply transferring spending from one location to another.

The proposal itself references Tarland as a comparator. If Tarland attracts substantially greater visitor numbers than Pitfichie is forecasting, then either the visitor numbers are a significant underestimate and traffic, social and environmental impacts will be much greater than claimed or the economic assumptions are unreliable. The application cannot rely on both arguments simultaneously. It is also unclear how large numbers of self-contained mountain biking visitors travelling in vans generate the level of local economic activity suggested within the proposal. **The proposal confirms that visitors to Tarland are mainly from Aberdeen - this confirms that the Pitfichie development will not achieve economic growth or new tourism, it is simply displacing economic activity.** The result is that other services and areas decline and others benefit. However, the net gain is negative as other areas fall into decline and require public funding to allow continued operation or fall into disrepair and become an economic and social problem. Other facilities such as the Lecht, should be promoted and visitors directed to these areas which have, along with associated businesses, historically relied on adventure tourism. Rather than slicing the small mountain biking pie into slices so small that no facility can support itself, we need a small number of genuinely great mountain biking centres. The Lecht, for example, is close to Aberdeen, has a large car park, on site facilities and uplift facilities in place. Developing Pitfichie will inevitably take visitors away from the Lecht and vice versa - thus hampering both facilities economic case. This is one example - there are other mountain biking

facilities in Aberdeenshire and with a small number of mountain bikers, the problem is clear for the long-term survival of facilities due to over-population. **There is no provision in the plan for the development of other facilities in Aberdeenshire and impact this could have on the viability of the Pitfichie development. The proposal recognises downhill mountain biking is a small sport with relatively limited participation, so new facilities will not encourage growth of the sport, they will simply slice the pie into even smaller slices. Overall, it is highly probably that the tax payer funded development will never be self-sufficient and given existing non-biking visitors will travel elsewhere, there will almost certainly be no net negative benefit.**

7. The Forest should be a mixed-use space

The proposal focuses almost exclusively on mountain biking interests. There is little meaningful consideration of walkers, runners, horse riders, families, casual cyclists and general forest users. The likely outcome is the gradual displacement of these users. A quiet, accessible forest will become dominated by uplift vehicles, downhill mountain biking, events, increased traffic and commercial operations. The claim that all users will benefit is unsupported. As parking charges will exist and the facility is for experienced downhill mountain bikers, it is an exceptionally exclusionary development with attempts made to deceive the reader into thinking other forest users will be able to continue to enjoy the forest. Therefore, this is another example where the net outcome will be negative for the overwhelming group of individuals who are not downhill mountain bikers.

8. Concerns Regarding Governance, Independence and Delivery Capability

There appear to be close links between mountain biking organisations, tourism bodies and parties supporting the application. This raises questions regarding whether the proposal has been assessed independently. There are further concerns regarding:

- GNE's experience in delivering projects of this scale.
- Lack of demonstrated commercial operating experience.
- Lack of environmental expertise.
- Lack of ecological expertise.
- Lack of hydrological expertise.
- Lack of evidence demonstrating capacity to manage a complex public facility.

The documentation contains aspirations and ambitions, but much less evidence of actual capability and an evidence-based argument.

In summary, the proposal is founded on uncertain visitor forecasts, an unproven commercial model, inadequate environmental assessment, negligible community support and a road network that is fundamentally unsuited to the development proposed. Most importantly, there is no credible decommissioning strategy, no protection for public money should the venture fail and no clear evidence that taxpayers will not ultimately bear the burden of restoring the site.

For these reasons, I strongly object to the proposed asset transfer and request that the application be refused.

OBJECTION COMMENT 2

I hope the Community Council will carefully consider my concerns about application APP/2026/1295.

Although GNE may present the proposal as benefiting everyone, it is primarily centred on downhill mountain biking, including trails, infrastructure, parking and facilities. I am not opposed to mountain biking, but I believe the development should be assessed honestly and in the context of Pitfichie and Cairn William as a whole.

Pitfichie is valued by walkers, cyclists, residents, families and wildlife enthusiasts. It is also part of the Bennachie Special Landscape Area and has significant woodland, biodiversity and landscape value.

I am concerned that the proposal may conflict with relevant planning policies relating to the protection of landscape character, biodiversity, woodland, habitats, soils, recreational amenity and the cumulative environmental effects of development.

There is also an important issue around management of the existing informal trail network. The current FLS management arrangements do not appear to address the increasing number of informal trails and the associated erosion and ground damage. FLS are already experiencing difficulties managing existing and informal trails across the hill.

I know that Aberdeenshire Trails Association is being used in relation to trail management, but an organisation such as this cannot realistically be expected to police or control an expanding network of informal trails across the hill. This raises an important question about what will happen if the proposed development increases visitor numbers and encourages further informal trail creation outside the formal trail network.

The shallow soils on parts of the upper hill make this particularly concerning. Once vegetation and the thin soil layer are damaged, erosion can develop quickly and recovery can be difficult. The Council therefore needs to consider not just the footprint of the proposed formal trails, but the wider and cumulative recreational impact on Pitfichie.

I also question whether the proposed biodiversity measures can be considered a holistic strategy for Pitfichie if they focus only on areas around the new trails while wider recreational pressure and informal trail development continue elsewhere.

The application should demonstrate that there would be no unacceptable habitat fragmentation, disturbance to wildlife or loss of biodiversity, and that any mitigation would be effective, deliverable, monitored and secured in the long term.

I encourage the Community Council to ask:

Is this primarily a wider community development or an expansion of downhill mountain biking?

How does the proposal comply with planning policies protecting the Bennachie Special Landscape Area and the landscape character of Pitfichie?

Would the development result in unacceptable visual, landscape or recreational impacts?

How will the existing informal trails and erosion be managed?

Given the difficulties already experienced in managing informal trails, who will actually be responsible for monitoring and controlling them?

Has the cumulative environmental impact of the existing informal trails and the proposed development been properly assessed?

How will further informal trail creation be prevented?

How will habitat fragmentation and disturbance be prevented?

Does the biodiversity plan address Pitfichie as a whole, rather than only the areas immediately surrounding the proposed trails?

How will woodland, shallow soils and sensitive habitats be protected?

What measures will ensure that the development does not lead to further uncontrolled recreational pressure?

What benefits are there for people who do not use downhill trails?

If the proposal is approved, how will the mitigation measures be monitored and enforced over the long term?

Who will have responsibility and resources to ensure that the conditions are actually complied with?

This is not about opposing mountain biking. It is about ensuring that any development is properly assessed, complies with planning policy, is environmentally responsible and is balanced for all users of the hill.

I particularly hope the Community Council will consider whether this proposal represents a genuinely holistic approach to Pitfichie, or whether it is primarily an expansion of downhill mountain biking being presented as a wider community and biodiversity project.

OBJECTION COMMENT 3

I wish to formally object to the proposed Gravitare North East (GNE) development at Pitfichie Hill.

I want to make clear at the outset that my objection is not an objection to mountain biking or to the responsible maintenance and development of the existing mountain-bike facilities at Pitfichie.

Indeed, on a personal level, I am a keen road & mountain biker myself and regularly use and enjoy the existing, well-established trails at Pitfichie. I value the opportunity the forestry trails provide to exercise outdoors and enjoy the natural environment, escaping from the busyness, noise, vehicles & danger that can be encountered during road cycling.

My objection is specifically to the **scale, nature and location of the proposed development**, particularly the introduction of a commercial downhill facility, regular vehicle uplift operations, increased visitor traffic and associated parking demand into what is currently a relatively quiet rural environment.

[REDACTED], I have heard the concerns expressed directly by many members of the community. In my view, the submitted proposals do not even attempt to address those concerns.

Access through Monymusk and the impact on the village

One of my principal concerns is the likely increase in traffic through Monymusk.

The most obvious route to the development appears likely to involve traffic passing through the centre of the village before continuing towards Pitfichie. The road through the village has no parking restrictions and, when vehicles are parked along it, the available carriageway can effectively be reduced to single-flow traffic.

This is a small village environment rather than a road network designed around a significant new visitor attraction. The route directly serves a number of community facilities, including the primary school, nursery, village hall and playpark.

I recognise that much of the proposed activity is likely to take place at weekends, particularly given the recreational nature of the development, but the proposed operation is not restricted to weekends. The Site Operation Plan envisages uplift operations Thursday to Sunday and the development also anticipates organised events.

My concern is therefore that additional development-generated traffic will be introduced into an already constrained village environment, increasing the potential for congestion and conflict between these vehicles and other road users.

The applicant's own response to the question of traffic and children attending the primary school acknowledges that it has not identified data for traffic passing through the village square, instead referring to the 2019 B933 traffic count.

In my view, a traffic count on the B933 does not adequately demonstrate the impact of additional development traffic within the village itself.

The final 1.25 mile of access is a single-track road

The concerns become greater beyond the village.

The final approach to the development is a narrow single-track road with passing places. It is effectively a dead-end road which, primarily serves residents and existing recreational users of forest trails including a relatively limited mountain-bike traffic compared with what is now being proposed.

The applicant itself acknowledges that traffic associated with the development will use the single-track road and estimates that at peak periods approximately 60 cars per day will use it.

The financial and business information, however, assumes approximately **10,000 cars per year** (and 20,000 riders per year).

This represents a substantial change in the intensity of use of a road which is currently appropriate to a rural forestry and recreational setting.

I am not convinced that simply stating that 60 cars per day is comparable with other rural roads adequately addresses the particular characteristics of this road, including its single-track nature, passing places, dead-end configuration and the presence of other recreational users.

I think it should be considered not only the number of vehicles but also **when those vehicles will arrive, how frequently they will meet other traffic and how the road will function when the development is operating at peak capacity or hosting events.**

Charging for parking could create additional off-site parking problems

The development proposes to charge visitors for parking.

The financial plan assumes approximately 10,000 cars annually and includes a parking charge within its projected income. It also assumes that a proportion of visitors will not pay.

This creates a straightforward concern: some visitors may seek to avoid the parking charge by parking elsewhere.

The Site Operation Plan itself recognises the possibility of off-site informal parking and states that this will be reviewed monthly or as required. It also provides for overflow parking during periods of high demand.

That is significant because it demonstrates that the applicant itself recognises that parking demand may extend beyond the formal car park.

There is already recreational parking pressure around Pitfichie. Additional vehicles using passing places, verges and laybys would create further congestion, inconvenience local residents and potentially obstruct the very passing places upon which the single-track road depends.

If parking charges are an integral part of the business model, then robust measures should be stated to prevent development-generated vehicles simply being displaced onto the surrounding road network.

Amplifying this issue further the vehicle of choice for many mountain bikers is the van or campervan which introduces overnight parking. The proposal from GNE only goes so far as to say it will try to discourage.

Regular uplift vehicles on shared forestry roads

The proposed uplift operation is another major concern.

The Site Operation Plan expressly states that **uplift vehicles will share the forest road with other forest users**. It specifically identifies walkers, horse riders and cyclists and proposes that uplift vehicles slow to a stop when approaching them, either waiting for the user to pass or waiting for the user to move safely off the road.

This is an important acknowledgement.

The forestry roads are currently enjoyed by a wide range of users, including mountain bikers, horse riders, walking groups, runners and dog walkers. The proposed development would introduce regular commercial vehicle movements into this shared environment.

The proposed mitigation effectively requires other users to accommodate the uplift vehicles.

I am concerned that, particularly during periods of regular uplift operation, the vehicles would come to dominate the use and character of the forest roads, to the detriment of the other recreational users who currently enjoy them.

The Site Operation Plan states that the site will remain open to all users all year round. However, maintaining formal public access does not necessarily mean that all users will continue to enjoy the same quality of experience or level of safety.

There also seems to be contradictory information supplied about if vehicles will be limited to 10mph or 15mph which should be clarified.

The nature of the proposed facility is specialist Downhill Racing

As someone who actually uses the existing Pitfichie trails, I think it is important to distinguish between mountain biking as general outdoor recreation and the proposed specialist downhill operation.

I enjoy riding Pitfichie because of the existing trails and the opportunity to exercise, ride with others and enjoy the forest environment. That is very different from creating a facility centred around repeated downhill runs, paid uplift and competitive downhill racing.

The applicant's own FAQ makes clear that a significant objective is the creation of "**world class, downhill competition trails**", intended to help develop riders towards world-class competition.

The Site Operation Plan also anticipates up to five events per year, with between 100 and 250 participants.

Pitfichie has hosted 2 events this year and both i believe resulted in numerous disturbance complaints.

This is therefore not simply a proposal to improve the existing recreational trail network. It is a proposal for a specialist downhill facility with a commercial uplift operation and large organised events.

That distinction matters when assessing the likely traffic, parking and recreational impacts.

The claimed family-friendly nature of the proposal needs to be considered realistically

The proposal is presented in part as being beneficial to families, young people and outdoor recreation.

I do not dispute that mountain biking can provide substantial benefits to health, fitness and wellbeing, and the existing trails clearly already provide those opportunities.

However, I question whether a paid downhill uplift facility should be characterised as an activity that is broadly accessible to all.

Many recreational mountain bikers, including keen amateur riders, now use e-bikes to assist with climbing rather than paying for repeated vehicle uplift. The most likely regular users of a paid uplift service are therefore those who specifically want repeated downhill runs, particularly experienced and competitive riders who do not ride E-bikes.

The applicant's own material describes Pitfichie as a smaller and more challenging facility for **specialist bikes and riders** and identifies uplift capacity as a factor limiting visitor numbers.

Downhill racing is also a relatively expensive form of cycling. With entry-level downhill racing bikes costing several thousand pounds, this is not an activity that can realistically be regarded as equally accessible to all families or sections of the community.

I therefore question whether the wider community benefits being claimed are sufficient to justify the scale and nature of the proposed commercial operation.

Concerns about the financial and business assumptions

The business plan also raises questions about the level of demand upon which the proposal is based.

The principal source of projected income is the uplift service. The plan assumes sustained operation over a almost all of the year and significant ongoing demand for paid uplift.

The proposal therefore appears to rely almost entirely on a relatively specialist market.

There is also a question about the practical capacity of the uplift service. The business plan identifies a potential capacity of approximately 35 uplift runs during an eight-hour operating day, but an individual rider using the service at its capacity would only be able to potentially obtain 8 uplifts during that period based on vehicles operating and the return trip time for vehicle. Based Strava data for existing downhill trails at Pitfichie the Bikes could be back at the carpark before the uplift vehicle can make the return journey.

It should be carefully considered whether the assumptions around rider numbers, uplift usage and parking demand are sufficiently robust to justify the scale of infrastructure and associated impacts proposed.

Community support should be considered in the round

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED], I was not aware at the time of the community survey which GNE subsequently presented as evidence of support.

The applicant's own Evidence of Community Support document states that its survey received **82 responses**. Its own summary categorises approximately 45–50% as strong supporters, 25–30% as cautious or neutral and 20–25% as strong objectors. Importantly, it identifies traffic and access as the largest negative issue.

I was however aware of an actual community-organised survey of residents which received approximately **250 responses**, of which around **90% were against** the development.

I therefore ask to consider all evidence of community opinion carefully and independently, rather than relying on the applicant's survey as evidence of broad community support.

The applicant's own survey demonstrates that there was a significant level of concern even within its own consultation exercise, particularly regarding traffic and access.

Alternative locations and approaches have not been adequately explored

[REDACTED], the community raised a number of alternatives.

Some of these included:

- using the **Whitehill entrance to Pitfichie**, which would avoid routing development traffic through Monymusk and provides much quicker access from the main B-road;
- further developing the nearby **Tarland Trails**;
- investing in development at **the Lecht**, potentially making use of existing uplift infrastructure.

These suggestions were raised as potential ways of delivering the recreational and sporting benefits being sought while avoiding some of the particular impacts on Monymusk.

From my experience of those meetings, the response to these suggestions was essentially that GNE wanted to develop this particular site.

I do not believe that is sufficient justification for selecting a location where the access arrangements create such obvious concerns.

The applicant's own evidence confirms that Tarland Trails already attract up to approximately 40,000 visitors a year. GNE itself identifies Tarland as a more appropriate comparison for Pitfichie than much larger centres such as Glentworth.

In contrast the Tarland Trail centre is designed to suit all ages & abilities and is accessed directly from a B road well away from the substantially larger village than Monymusk.

The proposal changes the nature and balance of recreational use at Pitfichie

Pitfichie is already a successful recreational & natural environment.

It is used by mountain bikers, walkers, horse riders, runners, dog walkers and other visitors. I am personally one of the mountain bikers & dog walkers who regularly enjoys the existing trails as I am also a local resident.

My concern is that the proposed development would change the balance of use from largely informal and dispersed recreation towards a managed commercial downhill facility, involving paid parking, regular uplift vehicles and organised events.

The Site Operation Plan confirms that uplift vehicles will operate on the forest roads and that the facility is intended to host organised events. Event planning will include traffic and car-parking management, vehicle uplift requirements and spectator management.

This is therefore not simply an improvement to an existing trail network. It represents a significant change in the intensity and character of recreational use.

This change of use through vehicles and numbers of people visiting can surely only negatively impact the natural environment.

Conclusion

I would emphasise again that I am not opposed to anyone enjoying the existing forestry trails as I and many others already do.

My objection is to the proposed commercial downhill facility and its associated scale of activity, with apparent disregard for the negative impact on the community.

I believe the proposed development risks imposing significant additional traffic, parking pressure and vehicle movements on a small rural community and on forestry roads which are currently shared by a wide range of recreational users.

I therefore respectfully ask that any proposed development of this scale or introducing vehicles on to forest trails is denied.

In particular, I believe FLS & Aberdeenshire Council should be satisfied that:

1. the road network through Monymusk is capable of safely accommodating the additional development-generated traffic;
2. the single-track final access route can safely accommodate the predicted traffic alongside residents and existing recreational users;
3. sufficient parking will be provided to prevent development-generated vehicles from using surrounding verges, passing places and laybys;
4. the impact of regular uplift vehicles on walkers, horse riders, cyclists, runners and other forest users has been properly assessed;
5. the claimed level of visitor demand and financial viability is supported by robust evidence;
6. the evidence of community support is considered alongside all other evidence of local opinion;
7. reasonable alternative locations and access arrangements have been properly considered;
8. the impact on the character and tranquillity of Monymusk and Pitfichie is acceptable; and
9. any claimed and real community, recreational and economic benefits are sufficient to outweigh the additional impacts generated by the proposed commercial operation.

Supporting mountain biking does not mean that every proposed form or scale of mountain-bike development is appropriate in every location.

In this case, I believe the proposed commercial downhill facility is being proposed in a location where the existing road network, village environment and shared recreational forest infrastructure are not appropriate for the intensity of use being proposed.

I therefore respectfully request that this objection be taken into account when determining the application.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Fw: Proposed Downhill Biking Centre on Pitfichie Hill
Date: 16 September 2026 14:49:39

----- Forwarded message -----

From: [REDACTED]
To: fls.communities@forestryandland.gov.uk
Sent: Wednesday 16 September 2026 at 13:08:49 BST
Subject: Proposed Downhill Biking Centre on Pitfichie Hill

This e-mail is to inform you of my great concern regarding the proposed development by GNE on Pitfichie Hill. I am astonished and disappointed to find that this proposal is being seriously considered.

The fact that in recent years FLS has allowed the creation of several downhill biking trails is very concerning. This suggests that FLS are no longer the guardians of the land and protectors of wildlife. Their support for this locally unwanted development suggests a bias toward mountain biking.

Already a number of local people, myself included have been put off using what was previously a great walking area following encounters with aggressive and entitled downhill biking individuals. A survey conducted locally has already shown an overwhelming desire to prevent this development in any form.

Regards,

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: The Proposed Pitfichie Hill bike trails and car park
Date: 17 September 2026 10:57:13

PROPOSED DOWNHILL BIKING CENTRE ON PITFICHIE HILL

I object to the proposed downhill biking centre on Pitfichie Hill.

This proposed development is very close to the Paradise Wood SSI and Lord's Throat which is an area of outstanding beauty and tranquillity which substantially benefits local people. I am not against bikers enjoying their exhilarating sport but the Pitfichie area cannot accommodate the increased traffic and commercial development associated with this project. The single track access road would have to provide access not only to FCS but a substantial additional traffic load to and from the proposed development which it is clearly not designed to accommodate.

The encroachment of a commercial development will also have an adverse effect on the natural surroundings which is part of the Bennachie Special Landscape Area. To quote a section of the Supplementary Guidance:

- *The Bennachie SLA is classed as an upland landscape type. As such emphasis should be on retaining their largely undeveloped and remote character. This means ensuring that any developments are located and designed to limit their wider visibility and, so far as possible, protecting open skylines and rugged summits*

This project does not retain the largely undeveloped and remote character of the Bennachie and Pitfichie.

In view of this I am very much against this proposed development.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Objection to Downhill Centre at Pitfichie
Date: 17 September 2026 11:31:49

I object to the proposed downhill Biking Centre on Bennachie because it is a major development which is going to have a massively adverse impact on the beautiful area which it will overshadow.

It is very close to the Paradise Wood SSI and Lord’s Throat - an area of beauty and tranquillity frequented by many wanting exercise, peace and a closeness to nature.

I live [REDACTED] and regularly use it to enjoy the Bennachie area.

The proposed 20,000 visitors is just too much and we all know what an extensive infrastructure this will entail. I am in favour of Bikers enjoying their sport but this proposal is out of all proportion to the area in which it is being landed.
The fee paying Car Park (and its substantial infrastructure) comes at a time when we should be encouraging the population to walk and not to be put off by repeated charges.
All in all this seems to be a fine idea but totally in the wrong place and I am very much against it.

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Downhill biking centre Monymusk
Date: 17 September 2026 12:42:21

Dear Sirs

I wish to object to the above proposal for a downhill biking centre on Pitfichie hill .
Primarily this is an intensely quiet and rural area of Aberdeenshire which should be preserved for future generations to enjoy as it is .

Access to this area is along a single track road which cannot support the number of potentially envisaged numbers of vehicles safely and without severe disruption to local residents on a regular basis .

[REDACTED]
Sent from my iPad

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Objection to Forestry Land Scotland Proposal - Pitfichie Hill bike trails and car park
Date: 17 September 2026 17:06:52

General Use

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please find below an objection to the Pitfichie Hill bike trails and car park proposal [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED].

I would be grateful if you could confirm receipt and ensure that the objection is recorded against the relevant application.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]

 Dear Forestry and Land Scotland,

I am writing as a local resident to object to the proposed Community Asset Transfer and associated development of mountain bike trails and facilities at Pitfichie Hill.

I appreciate that Pitfichie is already used by mountain bikers and I understand the attraction of developing the area for the sport. My objection is not to mountain biking itself. My concern is with the scale and intensity of the proposed development and the impact that I believe it would have on the local environment, wildlife, existing forest users and people who live along the access route.

Having considered the proposals, I do not believe that the environmental and community benefits of transferring control of this part of the forest to Gravitare North East have been demonstrated to outweigh the likely impacts on the local area.

Impact on wildlife and habitats

Pitfichie is not simply an area of commercial forestry. It is also an area of important habitat for a number of endangered species. I personally have had the pleasure of seeing red squirrels, pine martens and Ospreys to name but a few in and around the proposed site.

The Biodiversity Plan also acknowledges the presence of sensitive habitats and proposes managing a 20 metre corridor on either side of the trails. This is therefore not simply a matter of constructing a few narrow tracks. The proposal would introduce a significant and permanent change in the way this part of the forest is used and managed.

I am particularly concerned about disturbance caused not only by the physical construction of the trails, but by the large increase in human activity afterwards. The facility is intended to operate throughout the year and could attract approximately 20,000 visits annually across the existing and proposed trail network.

I am concerned that the long-term disturbance caused by cyclists, vehicles, spectators and organised events has not been adequately considered in deciding whether this is an appropriate use of this particular area of land.

Noise and disturbance

I am also very concerned about noise.

The proposal is not limited to quiet recreational cycling. The operating arrangements specifically provide for organised

mountain-bike events, with up to five events anticipated each year. The submitted information also recognises the possible use of a tannoy system at events.

This is particularly concerning because previous events in the area have already demonstrated the potential for significant disturbance. I have personally been aware of events involving loud music and tannoy announcements, which have caused disturbance to people living locally as well as to the surrounding countryside.

There have also been instances of people climbing over fences and hedges and behaving in ways which are not respectful of the surrounding countryside.

I appreciate that an operator can introduce rules and management procedures, but I am concerned that the proposed development would make this type of activity a regular and formalised part of the use of the forest rather than an occasional event.

FLS has a responsibility to manage national forest land for the wider public benefit. I question whether it is appropriate for a relatively quiet rural area to be turned into a significant year-round sporting and event facility when the consequences for neighbouring residents and wildlife are likely to be substantial.

Traffic and road safety

I have serious concerns about the increase in traffic on the road serving the proposed development.

The access is via a single track rural road which is already used by local residents, walkers, cyclists, runners and other recreational users. It has limited passing places and even now can require careful manoeuvring when meeting farm traffic or other road users.

The transport information submitted with the proposal itself predicts a substantial increase in traffic. The situation could be considerably worse during larger events. The proposal anticipates organised events with significant numbers of participants and vehicles.

I am concerned that this will result in vehicles parking along the surrounding roads and verges, additional vehicle movements on a narrow single-track road and increased conflict between vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians.

The applicant's own transport assessment identifies the need for additional passing places. This illustrates that the existing road infrastructure is not simply an incidental matter but is already recognised as requiring intervention to accommodate the proposed development.

Furthermore, as a local resident

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Therefore I am greatly concerned that the substantial increase in cars, vans and other vehicles would have a significant impact on [REDACTED] day-to-day life and [REDACTED] safety would be greatly compromised.

I appreciate that [REDACTED] are personal, but I believe FLS should take them into account when considering the real effect that the proposal would have on people who already live beside and use the access road.

The proposed development would bring considerably more traffic to a road which is also used by pedestrians, cyclists and local residents. This is a particularly serious concern for our family.

Litter and behaviour

There are already problems with litter following periods of high use and after events, including litter in the forest, car park and along the road approaching the site.

I am concerned that increasing the number of visitors and formalising the site as a destination for mountain biking and organised events will increase this problem.

I have also witnessed negative behaviour associated with previous events which has not always been respectful of the countryside, including people crossing fences and hedges.

The proposal relies heavily on management arrangements and visitors behaving responsibly. However, existing experience demonstrates that this cannot simply be assumed.

I am therefore concerned that the proposed development could increase rather than resolve the existing pressures on the forest and surrounding roads.

Water supplies and drainage

Another important concern is the potential effect on water.

Local homes rely on private wells and springs for their water supplies. The proposal involves the construction of trails, a substantial car park and associated infrastructure, together with changes to the way water runs through the site.

The applicant's own documentation recognises the need to protect nearby private water supplies.

I am concerned that clearing vegetation, constructing trails and forming the car park could alter natural drainage patterns and increase surface-water runoff. This could have consequences for groundwater and private water supplies, as well as potentially carrying sediment or other pollutants into local watercourses.

This is particularly concerning given the changing pattern of increasingly intense rainfall experienced in Aberdeenshire.

I do not believe that the protection of local private water supplies should simply be left to future operational management. It should be an important consideration in deciding whether this is an appropriate use of FLS land in the first place.

Is this really a local community facility?

I also question the extent to which the proposed development should be regarded as a local community facility.

The applicant places considerable emphasis on community participation and youth development. However, the proposal is specifically designed around downhill and enduro riding, including technically challenging trails and facilities capable of hosting regional and national competitions.

The applicant's own material describes the development in terms of challenging trails, training and competition and development towards higher-level riding.

I do not object to these activities. However, I question whether the claimed community benefit is sufficient to justify the environmental and social impacts that will be borne by the relatively small number of residents living immediately around the site and along its access route.

The wider economic benefits claimed for Aberdeenshire should also be considered alongside the very localised impacts on the surrounding community.

Impact on the wider character of Pitfichie

Pitfichie is valued not only as a place for mountain biking but as a rural forest and countryside used by walkers, cyclists, runners, residents and people enjoying the natural environment.

I am concerned that the proposal represents a significant change from recreational use of the forest to a managed, year-round sporting venue capable of attracting large numbers of visitors and hosting organised competitions.

Once this use is established, it will be difficult to reverse the resulting change in character and visitor pressure.

I therefore believe FLS should consider very carefully whether this is the right location and scale of development for this part of the national forest estate.

Conclusion

I fully understand the benefits of encouraging outdoor recreation and cycling, and I recognise that Pitfichie already has an established association with mountain biking.

However, I do not believe that this should automatically mean that any proposed expansion is appropriate.

The proposed development would introduce a substantially more intensive use of the forest, with year-round operation, potentially around 20,000 annual visits, organised competitions, additional vehicles, uplift activity and associated infrastructure.

In my view, the resulting impacts on wildlife, habitats, noise, local residents, road safety, litter, water supplies and the character of the area have not been adequately balanced against the claimed benefits.

I am particularly concerned that the consequences will fall disproportionately on the small number of people who live along the access road and immediately around the forest, while many of the claimed economic and sporting benefits will be felt much more widely.

For these reasons, I ask Forestry and Land Scotland to reject the proposed Community Asset Transfer in its current form.

If FLS is minded to support the proposal, I would ask that it does not do so until the outstanding environmental, access, traffic, water and community impacts have been properly assessed and satisfactorily resolved, with enforceable measures in place to protect existing residents, wildlife and other users of the forest.

I would be grateful if this objection could be considered as part of the assessment of the Community Asset Transfer request.

Yours faithfully,

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted name]

[Redacted address line 1]

[Redacted address line 2]

[Redacted address line 3]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text block]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Objection to Downhill Biking centre at Pitfichie Hill
Date: 17 September 2026 18:52:51

Dear Sir,

I object to this application by GNE for a Biking Centre at Pitfichie because:

As a local resident I enjoy walking in the forest undisturbed by motor vehicles and crowds of people the proposed events will bring. I am concerned about the safety of the general public walking in the area. I have had experience of walking down a path when a biker came from behind with no warning and totally unable to stop or get off the path. There was only just enough time for me and my fellow walkers to get off the path and it was sheer luck that my dog was not on the path. Walkers have as much right to be there as the bikers.

The access road is a narrow single track road with few passing places and is totally unsuitable for the volume of traffic which would arise from the proposed events and local residents would suffer as a result.

It is not right that anyone who wants to enjoy the countryside should have to pay to park their cars and have the peace and tranquility completely spoilt.

The uplift vehicles are meant to abide by rules in terms of speed and courtesy towards other people, but no mention is made of how will this be monitored to ensure that the rules are observed.

There is no mention of any provision for the access for rescue vehicles - ambulances/helicopters - in the event of an accident.

Yours faithfully,

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie Hill
Date: 17 September 2026 19:02:05

As a resident of Monymusk I have very strong objections to the downhill biking centre on Pitfichie Hill .
 [REDACTED] , to live in a peaceful , tranquil village was our dream [REDACTED] .
 This preposterous proposal has clearly no consideration for residents of the area , and will destroy [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED] as well as devalue our properties .
 Neither does it have consideration for

- 1 the beautiful landscape
- 2 the amazing wildlife that can be seen on the hill
- 3 the damage to the roads to access the hill
- 4 the danger to residents “ up the hill” who will be at extreme risks when , in the need for an emergency vehicle to there homes , it cannot access properties due to irresponsible parking
- 5 the risk of accidents with 20 thousand vehicles expected to travel through the 20MPH village , I can assure you ,on previous meets when 100s of vehicles INVADE the village , 20MPH is IGNORED , there is absolutely no respect for residents in the village
- 6 a toilet block , and car park placed on what currently is a beautiful landscape is not acceptable
- 7 this proposal from a minority group of SELFISH , INCONSIDERATE individuals
Who I am quite sure would not want this disruption , noise and invasion of vehicles , bikes and humans, passing through their village or landscape .
- 8 this should not be allowed to destroy the peaceful tranquil lives of Monymusk residents or the beautiful landscapes and wildlife on the hill .

I could go on , but I’m sure you will understand my feelings and anger at the SELFISH proposal .

[REDACTED]
 Monymusk resident

[REDACTED]

 This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
 To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
 Subject: Pitfichie Bike Trails
 Date: 17 September 2026 20:37:30

Dear Forestry and Land Scotland,

I am writing as a local resident to object to the proposed mountain bike trail development at Pitfichie Hill.

I understand that Pitfichie Hill is already used and enjoyed by mountain bikers and I appreciate the attraction of developing the area for the sport. I am concerned with the scale of the proposed development and the impact that I believe it would have on the local environment, wildlife, existing users and particularly those who live on the proposed access route.

The proposed site is a natural habitat to a great number of wildlife, including badgers, squirrels, red kites, Osprey and many more. I strongly feel such a development would have a significant impact on their habitats.

I am also concerned about the behaviour and disturbances caused when there have been bike events at Pitfichie. There has been littering and a lack of respect for local residents driveways, hedges, fences. This will only increase and become a regular occurrence if the development is approved.

Furthermore, I am particularly concerned about the increase in traffic on the road that has been the proposed access route for the development.

The access road is via a single track rural road which is already heavily used by the local residents, farmers and their machinery, school transport, walkers, cyclists etc. It has a few passing places and can already become congested. If the development were to be approved this would have a huge impact on the road and I cannot fathom how it would work at all.

Moreover, I am concerned that this will encourage visitors to proceed to park their vehicles along the access roads and verges etc and cause great problems for other users of the road.

[REDACTED] I'm very concerned that should this development be approved, then [REDACTED] going out for a walk would become increasingly difficult and thus affecting [REDACTED] well-being. I urge for this matter in particular to be considered with great care.

I also question how much the community would benefit from the proposed development. [REDACTED] The existing trails are technical and not for the faint hearted! The new trails are proposed as downhill tracks and other very technical trails - this takes an experienced biker of a certain level to be able to handle such terrain. Given the technicality of the trails it's clear this would be inclusive to those more skilled and experienced and not open to the wider biking community. Thus making it even less of a benefit to the community.

In my opinion, I don't believe Pitfichie is an appropriate location for such an expansion of the already existing mountain bike trails. I support the mountain biking community and understand the benefits that it brings to people's lives. However, should the proposed development be approved the impacts on wildlife, local residents, road safety etc would sadly suffer immensely.

I urge Forestry and Land Scotland to reject the proposal.

Yours faithfully,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

 This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie Hill bike trails and car park
Date: 17 September 2026 21:36:04

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to object to the proposed bike development at Pitfichie.

My main concern is the impact that increased use of the site would have on the surrounding area and the people who already use and live around Pitfichie.

The access road is a long, narrow rural road which is already used by residents, walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Increasing traffic and visitor numbers, particularly during events, would make this road more difficult and potentially less safe for existing users.

I am also concerned about the impact on the wildlife and natural environment. Pitfichie supports a range of wildlife, including pine marten and red squirrels, and ospreys are also among the species identified in the ecological information for the site. Increased activity, construction and informal access could cause additional disturbance to wildlife and damage habitats.

I am also not convinced that the proposed development is genuinely inclusive for the wider local community. While the proposal refers to different levels of ability, its main focus is on downhill and enduro riding, with steep and technically challenging trails incorporating features such as rocks, jumps and drops. This appears much more focused on experienced riders and organised cycling activity than providing a facility that can be enjoyed by beginners, families and the wider community.

I want to make clear that I am not opposed to mountain biking. My concern is with the scale and nature of this particular proposal and whether it is appropriate for Pitfichie and the surrounding community.

I would ask Forestry and Land Scotland to carefully consider the impact this development could have on the existing users, wildlife and character of the area before agreeing to the proposed lease.

Yours faithfully,

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

CATS Evaluation

Vision Evaluation against Scotland's National outcomes-.

Connected

The Pitfichie proposal is focussed on Downhill Mountain biking (DMB) community. The proposal is to build two trails. One the longest and most challenging will be entirely for a small group of elite competitors. The design has chosen the steepest possible slopes with some parts being as steep as 1:3 this is not for general use and will be extremely dangerous to those who have less experience. It therefore is quite a niche development and NOT for general use. The existing downhill trails on Pitfichie all have warning signs at the start as to the risk. The new DH1 trail will be at another level of challenge.

It will also be ticketed for sustainability limiting access to those who can pay the £35 plus vat ticket price for the uplift service which is required to restrict usage. DMB bikes are expensive, (£3000-£7000+) access to the site requires private transport. The proportion of population who can access this expenditure for a past time is limited. This is an affluent sport unless significant public funding is involved. Schools do not have the money for transport or resources to fund activity involving this.

Healthy

Getting out and riding a bike is undeniably healthy assuming the rider doesn't fall off and is wearing a helmet.

Downhill Mountain biking is a different form of biking where risk is part of the attraction and challenge. DMB is about speed downhill and adrenalin. An uplift service negates any health gains in terms of fitness. Injury rates are high and are recorded in medical studies (e.g. Becker et al, 2013 British Journal of Sports Medicine); from Austria records 41% of injuries leading to restrictions longer than 28 days. the study concluded that

'...according to our data DMB can be considered an extreme sport conveying a high risk of serious injury'

<https://doi.org/10.1136/bjssports-2012-091755>

Recently research has highlighted other dangers similar to heading footballs in that an 'Association between DMB racing with neurophysiological indices of sensory, attentional and cognitive processing in youth athletes' (July 2026)

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC13396929/>

Secure

DMB is high risk sport with inherent risk of injury, those who participate seek this out knowing there is a health service to pick up the pieces. This National outcome does not 'fit' with living a safe life.

Prosperous

Being able to enjoy DMB is a measure of prosperity if rather niche. However it is not a measure one could apply to wider society. Many would find the prospect horrifying. The National Outcome is not really applicable for the majority of the population.

Skilled

DMB undoubtedly takes skill as well as courage. Skills involved might be useful for racing drivers or perhaps soldiers and Drone pilots. Relevance to the concept of skills for the Nation though are difficult to equate in terms of the general population.

Sustainable

Sustainability is all about leaving the Planet in a better condition after ones actions. DMB that requires an uplift using fossil fuels is not sustainable. The impact of DMB on wildlife from research studies also suggests incompatibility.

2. Finance

The project needs significant government grant funding to go ahead. The financial statements are so full of contradictions and omissions of realistic estimates that one is lead to suggest it is not sustainable. It relies heavily on the good will of volunteers, and projections of profit are aspirational.

3. Non financial Benefits.

There is little local economic benefit that can be demonstrated. Two low paid driver positions will be created. Some aspirational biodiversity statements are proposed but no demonstrable delivery or measurement of success has been given. The introduction of regular uplift vehicles will have a negative impact on other forest users, exhaust fumes are not what one goes to the forest for a walk for. Part of the uplift route is very narrow on the bealach track, passing other users on the path will be problematic. Also for walkers on the hill greater use of all trails is problematic for walkers. Quite frequently one must listen constantly for DMB riders who descend at speed to be prepared to quickly step aside to avoid collision. This also does not make for a relaxing walk on the hill. DMB has a negative effect on wildlife that should be considered.

4. Equality

There have been assertions by GNE of accommodating other forest users and hill walkers. However, when the goal is to go down hill as fast as possible. It is impossible to

accommodate others desire for peace and tranquillity or the person who comes to watch birds undisturbed or ride a horse without concern.

Viability

5. Leadership

The project has been presented solely by a single individual, this has demonstrated leadership but should anything happen to this person it has been difficult to determine how many others are involved in delivering the project or teamwork. If there is only one person driving this then there is an inherent weakness in terms of sustainability.

6. Governance

This has been quite difficult to evaluate until just recently as nothing was accessible in terms of assessment. It is assumed FLS has done due diligence on governance.

7. Use of resources

The proposal is entirely supported by volunteers with the exception of two part time employed drivers. Other services such as toilet emptying are outsourced. How sustainable this is without overall site management is not explained. I do not think it has been demonstrated to be sustainable over 25 years.

8. Sustainability

The group has not demonstrated financially that it will be sustainable. Given the current proposal mode of operation the project has not demonstrated will be self sustaining.

9. Performance management

I am not aware from the documentation of any monitoring and reporting of achieving desired outcomes.

Community support and wider public benefit

10. Effective Partnerships

GNE state they will work with the Aberdeen Trails Association (ATA) to maintain the new trails. ATA are a voluntary organisation of individuals whose purpose is maintain and developing sustainable mountain bike trails in Aberdeenshire. This partnership is dependent on information provided by FLS which relates to the environment trails are constructed through. The proposal being considered is the first to undergo scrutiny in terms of planning permission which has not previously been sought for the other existing 12 miles/20kms of adjacent trails on Pitfichie and Cairn William. Many members of GNE are also members of ATA. This would suggest the pool of volunteers who will be involved in running and maintain the site is potentially limited. The number involved and how this will be managed over 25 years lease has not been demonstrated

say for the first five years as a start. The partnership is undeniably constructive but quite what the impact will be on other existing trails is difficult to evaluate. ATA have a good reputation nationally as a model for trail maintenance.

There inevitably must be a working partnership with FLS also. Should there be a case for retrospective planning permission being needed for the other existing trails which have a history of unauthorised creation, followed by transferring management to ATA and becoming authorised the question arises who will pay for the retrospective planning applications? Undoubtedly the development by GNE would lead to an increase in riding in the wider area given the cumulative impact this development is likely to result in. How maintenance would be continued in these other areas is unknown.

Already there is a trail known as 'Slippie Wille' which is no longer maintained and is technically closed. However, given evidence of trail riding on Strava and Trailforks https://www.trailforks.com/map/?activitytype=1&z=12.7&lat=57.23956&lon=-2.54955&content=trails,labels,region,poi,directory,polygon,trails_top,nst,waypoint,eventpremium

and DMB blogs it is ever popular and regularly used. It is 'closed' because the conditions are perceived to be too dangerous. It also lies within the surface water PDWA serving a number of houses in Monymusk (see Map 2 below). This is not the reason it is closed as both FLS and ATA appear unaware of the requirements for groundworks in PDWA



Figure 1 DMB trails from Trailforks website

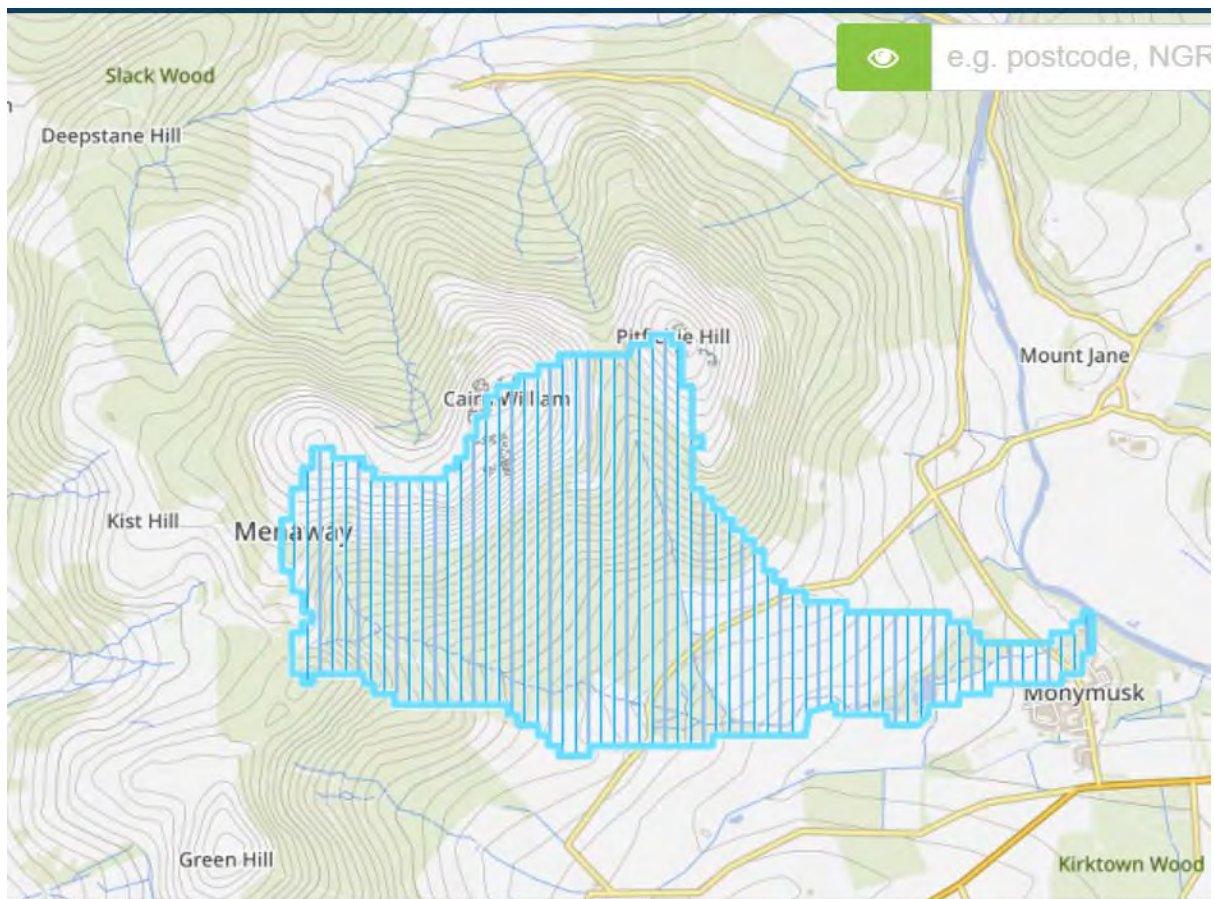


Figure 2 Map from Scotland's Environment website of the PDWA for surface water, (please note the legend shading on the web site has a error of swapping of groundwater vs. surface water. The entire area of the map is a PDWA for groundwater).

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There are no other apparent partnerships.

GNE no longer have access to additional overflow parking as per this and previous years due to disagreements over where and how events should be run. In a public information meeting hosted by CMMCC on 07/09/26 with an audience of approximately 40 people. The chair and vice-chair of CMMCC both heard the follow question asked to GNE. 'What will you do about events if you do not have access to overspill parking?' The GNE response was '...either not hold events or cram 100 cars into the carpark'. This would materially breach the planning permission for the 76 place car park. Event donations are projected to add £5000 annually to GNE's income.

11. Local Community support

GNE state they have 8-10 resident members in Monymusk. The census population recorded is approximately 895 (2022) dependent on defined boundaries this encompasses both the village core and the wider countryside. A GNE social media survey on the closed Facebook page 'What's on in Monymusk' had 83 respondents and

is included as Appendix1 on the FLS Pitfichie document page. There are approximately 2300 members of this private closed group many of whom live far away from Monymusk but have joined to keep in touch with village events and family. Many of the questions were open, e.g. 'Are you resident?' Of those answering 'yes' were individuals with postcodes in Banchory, Tarves, Old Meldrum, Inch, Oyne, and Inverness.

A survey carried out by a group of residents with information suggesting attending a GNE information event first and then completing the survey, achieved 217 response objecting to the proposal on a number of material grounds.

I would suggest this number of local objections together with the position of objection of Cluny, Midmar and Monymusk shows the local community is democratically opposing the proposal of CATS lease of Pitfichie Hill. I believe both surveys are available to the panel.

The local issues that cannot be resolved such as access along a narrow C class road that already has 54 patched potholes and is no longer salted or gritted due to Aberdeenshire Council cutbacks. Together with likely use of passing places by DMB or people who previously came and parked for free who are unwilling to pay carpark fees

This will inevitably cause local residents and farm businesses traffic problems. If it is more successful than predicted there will be equal problems of disappointed visitors who cannot access the limited ticket available.

It is unlikely there will be economic benefit to the village. There are three AirBnB properties in the village, but DMB enthusiasts tend to either camp or come in camper vans. How parked vehicles will be removed from passing places has not been addressed. Some local residents who do ride trails have said they will be compelled to go elsewhere as they ride in the forest exactly for its lack of use and tranquility. Tarland Trails appears to bring little business to the community of Tarland speaking to local businesses there.

It is likely as in Tarland community (Cromar community council report) it will have a divisive impact on what up until the proposal has been a dynamic resilient and innovative community. The community has many active groups these ranging from the Thrift Shop and Community café which has raised £300,000 for local and international charities in the last fifteen years. As well a country dancing, cinema, playgroup, a football club, senior citizens, indoor bowling, Tai Chi, Quilting, Mid Grampian community archaeology group, senior walking groups, an active new Mum's and baby group, Women's Institute group, and an active but small local Church of Scotland congregation with a Sunday school.

There is definitely a gap for activities for young people but cognitive impairment is a serious consideration in encouraging young persons to take up what DMB which is an

extreme sport. Also to say recent youth problems would be alleviated by a challenging DMB trail simplifies the events without real knowledge of what was a complex situation.

Recently a small new housing development has been put forward by the local landowner incorporating a community multi use games area which will benefit the Primary school and be available for community use for sport.

There will inevitably be some increased business likely for specialist DMB services in the wider Aberdeen area, but not locally to Monymusk whose residents have and will experience many of the more negative aspects such as event noise and loss of 'Sense of Place'.

12. Wider Public support

There are a number of other initiatives currently being constructed in Aberdeenshire. The Lecht Ski area is building downhill trails to expand its offerings in all season adventure tourism. Aberdeenshire Council is a major funder of the Lecht development . the owner of The Lecht area is keen to attract more customers.

Tarland Trails is also expanding what it can offer. It was suggested as a comparable model by GNE to take residents to understand GNE's proposal.

A development much closer to Aberdeen could impact the numbers going there and vice versa.

There has also been significant growth in local facilities for younger riders in the recently constructed 'pump tracks' at Houghton Park, Alford and Kintore. These offer the opportunity to develop bike skills and balance without neurological damage of rapid head movements, and potential for severe injury.

All these facilities for older riders may enjoy good business during holiday seasons but will be in competition with one another during other times of the year. Can the population of the North East support multi sites commercially? The down turn of the oil business has seen a reduction of opportunity for businesses and associated individual spend. I've seen this while working in education and the ability of families to fund trips during academies activity weeks. I've also seen education cuts impact the ability of schools to fund travel and trips.

Pitfichie is part of Aberdeenshire's Bennachie Special Landscape Area. This is a classification that celebrates and seeks to protect a landscape composed of a mix of lowland agriculture woodland and forested slopes with higher moorland and Hill forts. Bennachie itself is an iconic view point and it is flanked by Mill stone, Pitfichie and Cairn William. Bennachie is very popular for walking and increasingly mountain biking on trails but no DMB trails.the main visitor centre has a large car park but it has been planned amongst forest with the canopy covering the car park from key viewpoints. The GNE car park by contrast will be much more like a small industrial development when

full of cars and an obvious scar on the landscape when empty. Surrounding trees will take the proposals entire lease of 25 years before any screening is effective.

Pitfichie Castle and the surrounding landscape when viewed from Millstone, illustrates this section of the river Don's valleys richness of habitat. This river valley, with its pair of SSSI Oak woods, riparian fields and extensive moorland offers a unique combination for fauna to live in with little human impact. This is probably why a Honey buzzard one of the UK's rarest visiting migrants has bred here for several years. There is an opportunity if nature is given space and opportunity to recover. Will the Capercaillie return after 12 years absence? Probably not as it was the increase in mountain biking over that that created too much stress according to my friend, Robert Moss, the world's specialist on Capercaillie.

Can the Red Grouse hang on Pitfichie and Cairn William? Only if there is a reduction in use of trails and events. Certainly, it will be gone very quickly if this development takes place. Ground nesting birds such as the moorland Meadow Pipit on the summit of Pitfichie will suffer a similar fate. I have asked the founder of ATA whether the DMB calendar could avoid the nesting season as many trail centres do in Europe. The answer was no the calendar is fixed in the UK with the majority of DMB events happening during spring and early summer. Will the flock of Crossbills I watched go from treetop to treetop stay? I do not know, but noise both during the day and at night will not help. Nighttime biking activity has already taken its toll on a tawny owl earlier this year from a car driving in the forest at night.

The local community of Monymusk has had much discussion on this development and the majority who are not DMB enthusiasts cannot see any benefit locally.

Management of Scotland National forests and Land

13. Contribution to management of Scotland's National Forests and Land (SNFL).

The contribution GNE says it will make to SNFL is vague and unfunded relying on the as yet unspecified groups of volunteers. By contrast FLS has had and will have next year a new management plan. GNE have made much both verbally to the local community of replacing large areas of commercial Sitka Spruce with mixed planting. I have heard this personally from both GNE and NEAT. I have long had an interest in forest management plans in this area. There has been an ongoing change from commercial timber stands to planting for visual amenity and biodiversity throughout the last eleven years. Indeed I had a long conversation on the merits of this with the author of the existing LMP at the Bennachie Centre when it was being introduced in 2015/16.

There has always been a plan for allowance of the stands of natural Birch woods on the ancient woodland soils on the lower margins above fields; changing to mixed planting of Birch, Scots's Pine, and Norway Spruce. This was always the plan once the previous mix

of stands of Sitka Spruce, Larch, Douglas fir had been felled. However it is currently impossible to definitively comment as the planting maps of Pitfichie do not appear accessible on line, <https://forestryandland.gov.scot/media/qi1dclop/4-amended-restock-species-map.pdf> this is despite requesting this information from FLS some time ago some maps were sent by email but the area and information of interest were supplied in specialist GIS format that was not accessible.

From the little I have been able to see, I would suggest GNE's plans are fairly neutral in terms of replanting, it's not better than the FLS proposal. There would be an introduced trail foot print in the landscape, which would likely be very visible for at least a decade.

The area of car park requires compensatory planting elsewhere and that has not been identified in the proposal

The proposal for FLS to be working towards being financially sustainable in its corporate plan will be at a disadvantage if this proposal gets permission but does not prove to be financially viable and does not receive all the grant funding required and then fails to be sustainable. It may not then have the reserves for restoration to pre application conditions and will require some financing to return to the land management plan.

The Natural capital of the site will be influenced by the success or failure of the biodiversity plan. Without this development this area is currently rich in biodiversity, even with the windblow of various storms of several years ago. It is quite possible the presence of the project will diminish the biodiversity of the site simply due to the presence of more people more noise and activity.

Putting a sum on natural capital still doesn't have a consensus standard as to how to evaluate it. So it is difficult to assess when it has been improved or depleted. one might argue the impact of new trails through carbon rich soil on moorland is unnecessary when there are existing trails in place.

Also enhancing the resilience of Scotland's natural forest against climate change will not be advanced if fossil fuel vehicles are allowed and used so increasing emissions due to providing the uplift service within the Forest .

A key UK Forestry standard in Sustainability (of People and Landscape) is consideration of local community access.

The significance of local community engagement in the three year plan is also a stated to inform them of the choices FLS makes.

This is to be welcomed as our local community has only had communication come from FLS to the community council

once in the past ten years while our community has engaged with FLS to try and understand how situations have come about, such as Pitfichie being chosen as a pilot project for DMB following discussion by FLS with Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland without any local community consultation whatsoever.

In terms of the sustainability of the proposed development the Panel should assure themselves the financial information is consistent and 'adds up' as I have found significant inconsistencies, some mentioned above, which if corrected are significant in affecting the final balance of profit or loss.

There is much that is aspirational in this project but the details of how success will be measured are unclear particularly, when staffed almost exclusively by volunteers and many values key to the sustainability are speculative.

The assumption of the basis of CATS is of community support. This must be a rare case where the democratic view of the local community is one of opposition. Whether the proposal is approved or denied the past 13 months have had an unfortunate and lasting impact on our community.

FLS' decision will have significant consequences.

The second descriptive document is included as an appendix of further detailed information relating to the proposal.

Pitfichie Bike Trails and Car Park lease proposal by Gravitare North East OBJECTION

Appendix of Supporting Information

I write this as a personal objection [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

On Wednesday 9th September 2026 CMMCC took a vote of councillors (5 against to 2 supporting, 1 councillor unavailable due to work commitments) to object to the Downhill Mountain Bike (DMB) trail, carpark, toilets and associated infra structure proposal by Gravitare North East (GNE). No member of GNE was present at this regular CMMCC meeting held in Midmar Hall.

This CMMCC decision to object came after considerable, discussion, correspondence (both for and against) and meetings with all parties over the previous thirteen months. It also followed a public information meeting in Monymusk Hall put on by CMMCC on 07/09/2026, given the absence of any further information from GNE. Despite GNE confirming to CMMCC at the previous community council meeting on 29/07/2026 such a public meeting was planned. It never materialised and at one point GNE asked for no further correspondence from CMMCC.

Approximately 53 people attended on Monday 07/09/26. There was an opportunity to ask questions of FLS and GNE.

This response is structured in the Panel's assessment format, but from the perspective of an objector.

Key points

1. Access, road safety, conflict with core path route, and an inadequate road capacity; impact on Monymusk Heritage and local community in terms 'Sense of Place' from through traffic
2. Biodiversity contradiction. GNE have expressed aspiration for improvement. However, given proximity of DH1 to a known protected species nest site does not make sense. Incompatibility of DMB with fauna.
3. Risk to private water supplies and a Protected drinking Water Area due to unique problematic geology and sediments identified by BGS. Consideration of geology, hydrogeology, and hydrology with potential for pollution to river Don due to auto fluids in sheet wash during heavy rain.

4. Financial omissions and inconsistencies in the proposed model of sustainability, and lack of evidence of financial benefit to the immediate vicinity.
5. Substantial opposition from the local community of place concerning impact on access and loss of 'Sense of place' due to introduction of regular vehicle transits in forest and fossil fuel emissions.

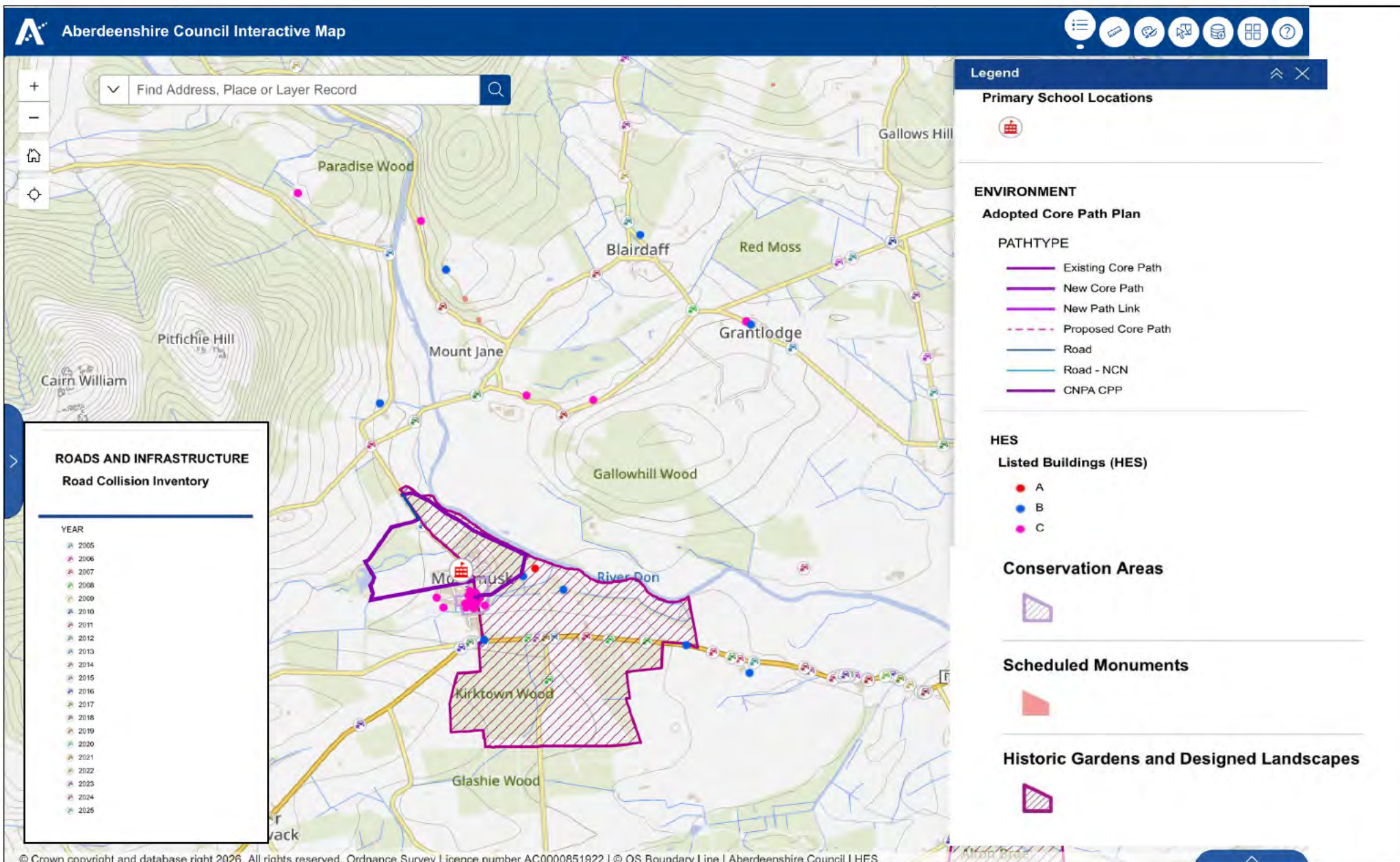
1. Benefits

- 1.1 The trails proposed will extend the formal and informal 25 miles (circa 40kms) of trail network on Pitfichie and Cairn William by 2.7 miles (4.3kms).
- 1.2 In terms of DMB this will create a trail of considerable steepness that does not currently exist in Aberdeenshire. However, there are already at least five downhill trails as well as a large extent of gentler graded forest road for less adventurous mountain biking. GNE only have management of the trail paths and 40m corridor
- 1.3 GNE have presented plans from the earliest days of consultation that have included some of the steepest slopes on Pitfichie with gradients of approximately 1:3 in places on the proposed DH1. It is these gradients that set apart the site's potential for a 'World Class site' as presented to the community of place in Monymusk.
- 1.4 However, fundamentally the location is problematic for a number of reasons. Below I identify the negative aspects of this development. I would suggest Benefit' here is entirely subjective.
- 1.5 GNE state on their OSCR page

*'The organisation aims to grow public participation in mountain biking across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire by providing trails, **facilities organised activities that improve quality of life for the local community. It also works to protect and improve the environment** around mountain biking areas,...'*

Also, the use of the word community throughout GNE's documents requires scrutiny as to whether GNE are referring to 'Community of Interest' or 'Community of Place'. They are very different concepts with differing needs, demographics and requirements.

Figure 3 Map of Monymusk Village Illustrating aspects of Heritage (Listed buildings, Designed Landscape, & Conservation area), Natural Environment, Core Path and recorded Road Vehicle collisions from Aberdeenshire Council Interactive Map



2. Negative Impacts

Impact on local community and heritage

- 2.1 Traffic flow through Monymusk is already quite congested at times. This would be further exacerbated by the introduction of a suggested 10,000 more vehicles a year. DMB enthusiasts often driver camper vans and frequently meet up with friends in separate vehicles. An estimate of 10,000 could be a significant underestimate. Other DMB centres such as Tarland Trails which has no uplift and is further from population centres recorded 58,000 visitors in its first year. This has subsequently dropped to about 30,000 but suggests that ‘guestimating’ visitor numbers accurately is difficult.
- 2.2 Monymusk already has a long and significant heritage.
A Neolithic settlement and remnants of a stone circle lies just north of the village (NJ 697 161), this is overlain by remains of a Bronze age settlement. In the 7th century early Irish Christian missionaries came to convert the local Pictish tribe of ‘Ce on Bennachie (Noble, 2024) and laid the foundations for the early Christian Priory. Later significant agricultural innovation was introduced by Sir Archibald Grant in the 18th century and the core of the planned village we see today, was built in the late 1880s and 90s, in a unique architectural style is celebrated visually amongst promotional photos of the North East at Aberdeen Airport
- 2.3 Monymusk does get visitors who do come for the heritage, for walks round the village, by the river or on the hills. A significant increase in through traffic would significantly impinge on the ‘Sense of Place’ a visitor would perceive.

3. Biodiversity Contradiction

GNE states one of its core principles is improving Biodiversity. This is at odds with the route the DH1 trail takes.

- 3.1. The NEAT lead officer has assured me earlier this year he knew where a category 1 protected species was breeding. I have conferred with the local monitoring officer for the North East Raptor Group as to the nest site location and considered the proximity to the DH1 trail. I consider it to be approximately 200m distance. The monitoring officer has also told me that although two chicks did manage to fledge this year. The parent birds were constantly alarm calling as vehicles and people entered the site.
- 3.2 This year noisy events were held within 1000m. if this trail goes ahead it will be within the legal buffer boundary, and the birds are very likely to abandon the site.
- 3.3. The nearest Osprey nest will be within approximately 800-900m of the finish area. This year a pair of Ospreys returned in Spring and the female stayed for two weeks before

abandoning the nest in May. There was an DMB event in May during which there was a lot of noise at the finish. This noise (cow bells, air horns and vuvuzelas) could be heard a mile away both north and south. Particularly in the north with steep slopes above the river, sound carries some distance. It is possible to hear vehicles some distance upstream as they come down the valley due to the acoustic carriage of sound and shape of the valley. Whether the two events had anything to do with the failure of the nest site is unknown. When asked about this event noise, the response from GNE was 'that is our culture.'

- 3.4. Much of the biodiversity plan is aspirational with no fixed goals or measure of success. The PEA it is based on is also very weak. A survey in January will not reveal very much. It should have been followed up in a later season and with evidence from NESBRec and a literature review which would have found a PhD on the Pine Martin population around Royhall and on the hill. The owner of Royhall offered this information at a public meeting on 27/09/25 but there was no follow up or engagement with the residents.
- 3.5. I am a reporter with NESBRec and have recorded species on and near Pitfichie including Crossbill, and Honey buzzard in flight recently.
- 3.6. If improving biodiversity really is a core principle of GNE its plans should have more substance. There is much made of removing exotic species, but the FLS land management plan has long had this goal with replanting by FLS proposed as a mix of birch, Scot's Pine and Norway Spruce. Improving visual amenity, biodiversity and perpetuating areas of Ancient Woodland and associated soil biota and flora.
- 3.7. GNE have yet to understand raptors and DMB are not mutually compatible. Also there has been an increase in nighttime DMB with head torches. GNE say they will manage the site out of hours, but access will still be available for riders .
- 3.8. I have had conversations with DMB enthusiasts encountered on Pitfichie as to their views on the project over the past few months while walking. Many have electric bikes and say they do not need an uplift and will not pay the new car park fee. Some have said they will go elsewhere. Other have said GNE cannot stop them creating their own trails which they consider better. GNE will only have management over the leased corridor and trail footprint. GNE's project will not solve the problem of unauthorised trail use or creation.
- 3.9. Site and trail management is projected to be by volunteers. I asked to meet with Aberdeenshire Trail Association (ATA) to understand delivery and as I have concerns about drainage created in the moorland areas. At our second meeting we went up onto the higher hill with the lead ecologist and founder. I explained my drainage concerns side drains were being dug with material dumped on heather vegetation a short distance away. This was then killing the underlying vegetation and creating areas liable to erosion and loss of surface vegetation. ATA agreed drainage could be improved and

admitted they only managed to work on a full trail about once every 5 years given the extent of trails across the hills here and the need to prepare for, and repair after events. There was no knowledge of the particular nature of geology here or understanding of the relationship with groundwater or awareness of the PDWA. They relied entirely upon FLS for information on planning or legal guidance.

- 3.10. Under their own management who would guide them as they are largely non specialist volunteers? This is not stated. There is reference to advice from various environmental organisations on biodiversity but no substantive evidence of what this advice is. Literature, verbal advice or consultancy?
The panel may wish to assure themselves of the appropriateness and detail of this 'advice on Biodiversity enhancement to Pitfichie.
- 3.11. Improved sediment traps would need regular maintenance, whether a voluntary organisation has this capacity to manage the entire area of Cairn William and Pitfichie is unknown?

4. Risk to private water supplies and a Protected drinking Water Area due to unique problematic geology and sediments identified by BGS.

Consideration of geology, hydrogeology, and hydrology with potential for pollution to river Don due to fluids in sheet wash during heavy rain.

- 4.1. This risk requires an explanation of the geology, hydrogeology and hydrology of Pitfichie.

There are private water supplies (PWS) in the area's proximity for several properties and a legislative Protected Drinking Water (PDWA) area supplying some properties in Monymusk. The PWS' are badly mapped by FLS and even Scottish Water admit their data base is incomplete. The PDWA is the catchment of the Pitmunie Burn. The route of the uplift service to the Upper climb trail and turning circle as well as the trails 'Slippie Willie', Cairn William Downhill, and Tombstone downhill all lie within the PDWA. These are regularly worked on by Aberdeen Trail Association who were unaware of the PDWA as was FLS until informed by CMMCC. This does not appear to have caused any changes in ATA protocols.

- 4.2. The final uphill section of the bealach [N-S section] towards the saddle point of Cairn William / Pitfichie is the uplift route is a walking path and not used for forestry vehicles. This route will require extensive modification and is omitted from the planning application. If it was included the site would fall under more extensive major planning protocols. Any work here will require a planning application by either GNE or FLS.
- 4.3. Within the granite of Pitfichie is an extensive presence of Leucogranite, Zircon, Monazite, Apatite and Alkalai Feldspar mineral., The latter minerals are a source of

Uranium and Uranium progeny including isotopes of Radon, Radium, Thorium and Polonium

- 4.4. Areas of potentially high soluble radon and uranium groundwater content, and radon gas also occur here.
- 4.5. Groundwater is limited to fractures and classified as category 5 in terms of vulnerability i.e. the most vulnerable to pollution given limited volumes held in fractures within the granite, (Ó Dochartaigh, 2011).
- 4.6. The moorland summit area, a protected habitat, is an area of shallow peat soils overlying a thin mineralised layer above bedrock. The shallow peaty soil layer has been thousands of years in formation. Although it is dense, it is also fragile and not self-healing. Therefore, trails created in it cannot be considered 'temporary'. Further path creation and disturbance of peaty soils create downslope drainage channels and have the potential to dry out peat layers and consequently cause CO₂ emissions and erosion.
- 4.7. There is also an area of deeper peat present adjacent to the 'turning circle', this is potentially vulnerable to any track maintenance work or disturbance, discharged auto fluids such as air conditioning condensate or manoeuvring of vehicles.

None of the above have been considered or assessed in the Planning application by the Developer. These include serious potential risk to groundwater and PWS via disturbance of sediment, exposure of bedrock, erosion and pollution. These should be assessed for current base levels and risk from the development.

These are matters for SEPA who should be consulted given SEPA's ,2024 'Guidance on Assessing the impacts of Development on Groundwater abstractions'.

<https://beta.sepa.scot/media/e3gbu5sq/assessing-impacts-developments-groundwater-abstractions.docx>

4.8.0. Geology

- 4.8.1. Pitfichie Hill bedrock is part of the Cairn William, and Bennachie granite pluton, formed as part of the Cairngorm suite uplift.
- 4.8.2. It was identified as a potential geothermal heat source with other granite plutons of the Cairngorm suite by the British Geological Survey (BGS) in 2013, for the Scottish Governments Study (Scottish Government Contract Ref. CR/2011/07). These are classified as radiothermal granites. The heat is generated the presence of Zircon, Monazite, Apatite and Alkalai Feldspar minerals.
- 4.8.3. This area was surveyed by the BGS as part of a UK wide Geochemical Atlas, sampling stream water and stream sediment. The samples included Uranium analysis.
<https://nora.nerc.ac.uk/id/eprint/524956/1/OR18048.pdf>
The BGS sample sites can be found on Scotland's Environment web site as a GIS layer.

- 4.8.4. The individual site values of Uranium in both stream water and stream sediment here are available from the BGS under licence. The BGS methodology for sampling assumes stream sediment is generally representative of the wider environment. However, in a small, localised area and one with groundwater held in fractures it is very possible there will be significant variation within a small three-dimensional volume of bedrock as beneath Pitfichie.
- 4.8.5. Examples demonstrating this are situations where adjacent domestic dwellings have significantly different internal radon levels in air. Examples of this exist in this area, (see UK Radon map, UK Radon <https://www.ukradon.org/information/ukmaps> [accessed 14/09/2026]).
- 4.8.6. Variation in values of Radon and Uranium in water will depend on proximity of supply, but can also be surprisingly different. Other factors such as changes pH, and vertical movement of the water table through the bedrock allow interaction with Uranium and changes to such that Uranium may become insoluble or may go into solution dependent on oxidation states and pH. Disturbance of peat soils provides situations where water entering the groundwater table can cause such pH changes.
- 4.8.7. The BGS geochemical survey did not do seasonal sampling; therefore the data set is simply a snapshot which may vary from seasonal values. However, it is known there is seasonal variation of both Uranium and Radon in air and water, and this should be considered in monitoring.
- 4.8.8 Problems with Radon in drinking water were identified by Centre of Expertise for Water (CREW, Akoumianaki I. et al. 2015, James Hutton Institute, <https://www.crew.ac.uk/about>).
- 4.8.9. An Aberdeenshire planning application for a commercial tourist development in 2022, making use of a 44m borehole at a site three miles north-northeast adjacent to the Glachie burn and Bennachie Centre, resulted in identifying groundwater with variable radon levels of several thousand becquerels per litre (Bq/l). It is highly likely the uranium content is also very high although this has not been tested as there is no legal requirement to do so currently.
- https://upa.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/online-applications/files/24684712ABFCADFF5BE865224ECE1A31/pdf/APP_2022_1900-PRIVATE_WATER_SUPPLY_TEST_RESULTS-10304340.pdf
- 4.8.10. The recommended level for radon in drinking water in the UK is 100 Bq/l although under certain circumstances 1000 Bq/l is considered a permissible upper limit. The danger being the consumption of alpha particles. Radon222 has a half-life 3.8days, therefore storage is a possible means of reduction as is boiling or bubbling air through the water

supply which helps vent off radon gas to air. Radon in air is recommended as being below 200Bq/m³ some houses in the area have known radon in air issues.

- 4.8.11. Soluble Uranium is considered harmful due to action as a heavy metal rather than radioactive emissions. High levels of Uranium in drinking water are damaging to the kidneys and bladder. WHO advises maximum level of 35ppm. A recent test of a borehole close to Pitfichie exceeded this level, (private communication).

Risk to health with any individual is complex with risk factors due to gender, lifestyle, exposure level and age. Uranium also can exchange with calcium and deposits in bones and poses a health risk related to incidence of leukaemia.

4.9. Protected Drinking Water Area

- 4.9.1. This PDWA was enacted in 2014 to protect the drinking water supply of a number of houses in the area and village. The legislation relates to article 7 of the Water Framework Directive and requires that if activities are carried out within the PDWA, precautions are taken to prevent deterioration of the drinking water supply and Scottish Water notified three months in advance of activities. This PDWA is not even mentioned within the application despite proposed construction potentially impacting it. The Uplift route, turning circle and upper climb route all lie within the PDWA. There should be an awareness of this demonstrated in terms of legal compliance and potential impact.

A map of the PDWA area can be found on Scotland's Environment Map site, (<https://www.environment.gov.scot/>). This GIS mapping tool can usefully compare locations of peat soils, native woodland, ancient woodland and relevant geology.

- 4.9.2. Part of the uplift route within the PDWA includes the small steep section of track used to access the Upper climb route this is not a forest road and currently experiences erosion during periods of heavy rain and usage. A track may have been used to access the historic 18th century Henley's Quarry (NJ 66380 17018) but it was not the current track as the location is different. This quarry was used briefly for Feldspar extraction exported to the Staffordshire Potteries as a fluxing agent during the 18th and 19th centuries.

- 4.9.3. This small track is likely to have led from the quarry to the village. This was not the present track over the bealach. The first OS map edition, 1866, shows a small path running up alongside the Pitmunie burn and finishing halfway up the bealach. By the early 20th century this path has been lost. The steepness of slope here (11.7% or 1:8) would make it impossible for 18th/19th century carts. Pack horses would have likely been the means of transport of quarried rock.

- 4.9.4. The present day bealach track runs in a slightly different location, just to the east and adjacent to a mediaeval enclosure wall. It only appears on OS maps in the early 1950's

and was likely used as a route for the Forestry Commission tree planters to access the hill.

- 4.9.5. The use of the uplift route on this small narrow bealach track which is not constructed to Forest Road standards and has no structural drainage will inevitably require maintenance or substantial work. This will require a planning application for such work as it is currently not in a suitable state for regular use by uplift vehicles. This has not been included in the APP/2026/1295. Inclusion would increase the Aberdeenshire planning application 'footprint' area to over two hectares and become a major category application with all the extra consultation and detailed environmental assessment required.

The proposed new Upper climb route passes around Henley's quarry through pristine moorland. Depending on feldspar exposure related to path construction there is potential to release Uranium as well as change groundwater pH due to disturbance of the dense shallow acidic peat soil and impact the PDWA.

- 4.9.6. The following are guidance documents from Scottish Water for activities within a PDWA.

<https://www.scottishwater.co.uk/-/media/ScottishWater/Document-Hub/Key-Publications/Energy-and-Sustainability/Sustainable-Land-Management/200320SWProtectedDrinkingWaterV4Lrweb.pdf>

Disturbance of Peat activities

<https://www.scottishwater.co.uk/-/media/scottishwater/document-hub/key-publications/energy-and-sustainability/sustainable-land-management/091120swlistofprecautionsfordrinkingwaterandassetspeatrestorationedf.pdf>

Mining and Quarrying activities

<https://www.scottishwater.co.uk/-/media/scottishwater/document-hub/key-publications/energy-and-sustainability/sustainable-land-management/091120swlistofprecautionsfordrinkingwaterandassetsminingandquarriesede.pdf>

4.10 Hydrology and Hydrogeology

- 4.10.1. There are two surface catchments draining Pitfichie and a short length of un-named burn draining eastwards from Pitfichie Castle into the river Don.
- 4.10.2. Although most of the area of interest and access routes are well above the river Don. During intense downpours there is extensive surface water flooding where burns cross access roads such as at Pitfichie steadings and downslope along the C121 from the site entrance down to the river bank. Also ditches on either side of the road are inadequate or blocked and fill giving rise to sheetwash across the entire road. This is a minor C road

so does not merit regular maintenance or winter gritting anymore given Aberdeenshire Council's budget reductions.

(see surface water flooding on SEPA Flood Map, <https://beta.sepa.scot/flooding/flood-maps/>).

Dependant on soil moisture conditions on the hill, similar extensive sheet wash conditions can be experienced across the hill leading to material being eroded and flushed into burns. Particularly as trails cut are effectively surface drains. Climate models predict this change in intensity of rainfall is likely to increase and should be accounted for in drainage design. Other consequences of extremes of weather as seen this year, are also the increasing likelihood of associated fire risk.

- 4.10.3. The Pitmunie burn (a PWDA) drains the southern slopes of Pitfichie and Cairn William, and a tributary of the Slack burn drains the north slope. Bedrock is fractured in many places close to the surface which makes it free draining to groundwater over much of the area. However, there are also small random areas of surface wet flushes or groundwater dependent terrestrial ecosystems (GWDTE) important for reptiles, amphibians and ground nesting birds.
- 4.10.4 These are easily identified due to changes in vegetation and small patches of peat; some are more seasonal. Those on the lower slopes which are more persistent are frequently locations of shallow wells for private water supplies. Typically surrounded by with rush, horsetail and sphagnum in abundance, and sometimes small peat deposits.
- 4.10.5 It is the small volume of groundwater held in fractures that makes this area technically vulnerable to pollution. (Ó Dochartaigh B É, et al., 2011).
Examples of pollution from vehicles may be car air conditioning condensate release. Over time this water can develop a build up of biofilms, fungal growth, and air cabin particulates.
- 4.10.6. Given the variability of recharge of groundwater due to increasing extremes of weather PWS will likely be more vulnerable and less dependable in the future. This has already led to an increase in the use of borehole supplies. However, these are also susceptible to the risks outlined earlier of increased Uranium, Radon levels, and other pollutants such as bike wash detergents, engine oil and brake fluid.
- 4.10.7. Also, any small geochemical changes in groundwater due to disturbance of soils and sediments across the site will have the potential to release Uranium and Radon. This poses a potential problem to domestic supplies particularly if changes to pH also occur due to acidic peat disturbance. While radon can be mitigated but is costly on a

domestic scale uranium cannot realistically as filtration of water produces a low-level radioactive waste which is expensive to dispose of at a domestic scale.

- 4.10.8. The above risks have not been evaluated. Uranium and Radon are present naturally here, but if levels are increased through human activity, then this can be defined as pollution and falls under the remit of SEPA.

5. Financial omissions and inconsistencies in the proposed model of sustainability, and lack of evidence of financial benefit to the immediate vicinity.

- 5.1. The commentary on the financial spreadsheet is very vague aspirational without evidence and optimistic. Careful reading of the Financial spread sheets reveals inconsistencies in the figures. For example days of operation in some places it is stated the uplift scheme, which is critical to the financial success of the project will run 40 days,45 days and in others it will run 50days.
- 5.2. The first years income is based on 15,000 cars with an assumption of double occupancy. There is no allowance for inflation, diesel costs are based on a price of without VAT assuming this will be claimed back.
- 5.3. However, this takes time and there is no evidence for allowance of this, inflation has also raised prices by 25% in actual cost since the document was written and it has not been updated.
- 5.4. The two employed drivers arrangements are also vague will they be zero hours contracts or have full employees rights with paid holidays and compliantwith statutory legislation?
Employers costs are stated as 30% at one place and 40% at another.
Reference is made to expenditure by visitors on local hospitality as a benefit.
- 5.5 There just seem to be too many inconsistencies.

6.0 Substantial opposition from the local community of place concerning impact on access and loss of ‘Sense of place’ due to introduction of regular vehicle transits in forest and fossil fuel emissions.

6. GNE asked for advice from CMMCC as to how to engage with residents of the community council’s area. I alone from CMMCC replied as Monymusk was the closest settlement. I explained that previously I had carried out surveys for CMMCC of Monymusk residents relating to Road Safety, Storm Arwen compensation, The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee, and the local GP practice in relation to NHS Social and Healthcare facilities. I explained due to variation in digital access and the demographics of our population this required temporary posters on lamp posts, house drops, hard copy

surveys available from the then Village Post Office now a community Thrift Shop, and the Village Hall and a location to return them to. As well as an online survey such as Survey Monkey to achieve maximum reach.

However, a GNE trustee decided to do an online social media survey via on a closed village Facebook page. This Facebook page has a following of about 2300 people with an interest or connection to Monymusk, of which only around 300 live in or near Monymusk. On reviewing the questions they were very open to various interpretations. For example, 'Are you resident?' This resulted in respondents identifying residency as far away as Inch, Kemnay, Old Meldrum and Inverness. There were 83 respondents and post codes were provided by most respondents.

This survey was accompanied by a very small map and not much information and went out on 20/08/25 long before any other information events were held. It has now been presented as covering the entire CMMCC area. It may have been completed by others living in the CC area but it is not representative of the full community of Monymusk. or area of CMMCC.

Some residents were concerned about the lack of engagement by GNE with the wider community of place and felt they had not had a chance to express their views and that an information meeting by GNE had only been publicised 2 weeks and needed more publicity. So they then decided to do a more comprehensive house drop survey using only the information GNE had used in publicity and suggesting respondents go to the event and see the information before completing their survey. The results of this survey has been submitted by FoP group separately.

The results were objection responses for 217 of which 166 live within the Monymusk section of CMMCC .(25 support and 5 undecided)

Following two competitive events in May, I am concerned about escalation and control of events run by volunteers. The first event went reasonably well, there was an adequate supply of portable toilets and good marshalling. There was some night time activity and evening racing on roads that was less acceptable but overall tolerable.

The second event was quite different, many of the previous competitors participated. Marshalling was poor, several near misses on roads with younger less experienced competitors. Some appalling behaviour climbing residents garden walls around Pitfichie Steading area, public urination in front of residents. There was reported damage to silage by people taking short cuts. An ambulance needed redirecting. The finish area on the hill was where vendors gathered, preevent advertising had suggested free beer, DJ's and food. The noise on that day was heard far and wide at least a mile away. Prior to community resident feedback the event was deemed a huge success by the organiser and GNE in conversation with myself. Since then there has been

considerable reflection on all sides an increased fear by residents of similar future events.

I am very concerned that the problems outlined above will impact the area of Pittfichie and Monymusk quite profoundly. The Don valley here is a remarkable area of mixed landscape with most habitats in North East Scotland represented. This is reflected by its categorisation as a Special Landscape Area by Aberdeenshire Council. The proximity two SSSI's, and a rich and diverse flora and fauna create a haven exemplified by the presence of Honey buzzard establishing a breeding site here.. However increasing pressures of population and pressures on the

I am concerned that events and the £1000 donations from event organisers (as shown in financial spread sheet) are an essential part of the sustainability of the project. To hold

References

Akounianaki I, Potts J, Ibiyemi A & Morris S 2015. Radon in groundwater drinking water supplies in Scotland. Available online at: [crew.ac.uk/ publications CRW2014_11](http://crew.ac.uk/publications/CRW2014_11).

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Noble, G., Gonzalez Bojaca L L , Worsman R., & O'Driscoll J., (2024) Defining the Sanctissimus: the early medieval church enclosures of Pictland' *Proc Antiq Scot* 153:121-140.

Ó Dochartaigh B É, Doce D D, Rutter H K and MacDonald A M. 2011. User Guide: Groundwater Vulnerability (Scotland) GIS dataset, Version 2. British Geological Survey Open Report, OR/11/064. 25pp.

UK Radon <https://www.ukradon.org/information/ukmaps> [accessed 08/01/2023]

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Objection to GNE Proposed CAT for Downhill Biking Development on Pitfichie Hill, Monymusk, Inverurie, Aberdeenshire
Date: 17 September 2026 23:33:59

Dear Sir or Madam

I hereby list a number of objections to the proposed Gravitate North East Downhill Byking development on land acquired through proposed Capital Asset Transfer (CAT) on Pitfichie Hill, Aberdeenshire. As a resident [REDACTED] my objections are significant, sincere and heartfelt due to the development having a significant impact [REDACTED]. My concerns are as follows:

1. **Road Access** – the proposed access road is a single-track road with a small number of passing places, The estimate of 20,000 visitors a year would add significant traffic to what is already a busy rural road with three farms and their heavy machinery passing along the road throughout the day along with existing domestic traffic and all the service vehicles that serve households along the road. The estimate of 20,000 visitors would as already said add significant traffic but there is a strong possibility that it could be even more when Tarland cycle trails report 40,000 visitors a year. Pitfichie and the proposed site is closer to Aberdeen, the A96 and almost all of the major settlements in Aberdeenshire. This has the potential to make it more favourably accessible in terms of distance than Tarland and numbers could be significantly more. The impact of this has threads which cut across and have implications around my other concerns below.
2. **Parking** – I am concerned that the proposed parking may not be enough at times. GNE have said they will ticket the parking if there is an event. In reality people would not just turn around and go home, they would park up on verges, in gateways etc and this would just add to any congestion and would be unacceptable.
3. The road is used by a number of people who have **protected characteristics**, namely people with disabilities and elderly people as well as walking groups heading to the hill or Paradise Woods. There are no pavements on this road and people use this road to walk along to maintain their health and wellbeing. [REDACTED] With increased traffic [REDACTED] wellbeing / health would be at risk. I ask the question do FLS want to be responsible for the lease of land through CAT which would impact on a disabled person's life as well as other people's health and wellbeing?
4. **The impact on nature and the natural environment** would be significant. We as humans are already on a collision course with nature, and the impact of human activity is already well documented locally, nationally and internationally. In this case it is the responsibility of us as rural citizens and FLS to protect the natural environment as much as possible. We have already had two downhill cycling events on Pitfichie hill this year and were allowed from my understanding by FLS. These events were held on May 9th / 10th and May 23rd / 24th. This was at the peak of the spring and many of the natural events that take place at this time of year in terms of flora and fauna. The one that specifically comes to mind is the peak of the breeding / nesting season for our birds and mammals and the impact the biking fraternity had on these animals. What was particularly disturbing was the abject lack of respect for these breeding animals and I can illustrate by what can only be described as continual use of air horns by spectators as participants raced down the hill. [REDACTED] – it was unbearable I wonder what the impact was on the breeding animals. There are some very vulnerable species breeding / living on Pitfichie Hill namely red squirrel, pine marten, red kite, osprey, goshawk (I believe), tawney owls, kestrels, sparrowhawks, and buzzards. There is also diminishing numbers of red grouse and mountain hares. These animals must be protected and FLS have a role in this by not allowing the CAT for the GNE application.
5. **Private water supplies** – there is no mains water around Pitfichie Hill, and all our household rely on aged private water supplies. These wells are long established and are increasingly vulnerable with climate change. These supplies all have their origins in rainwater which falls to the ground, and this then surface water percolating through the soil / earth and collecting into long established veins of running water which serve our wells. Any excavations on Pitfichie Hill to form new cycle tracks leads to the potential of these veins of water being destroyed / disrupted and consequently impacting on our water supplies, this issue was raised at the recent event in the village hall and when asked who would be liable for any losses incurred through the loss of water supplies, GNE or FLS. GNE for causing disruption through all their excavations or FLS for permitting this development to take place. GNE did not have the answer to this. I believe there is legislation in place for landowners to take due regards of development on land which serves to supply private water supplies.
6. **Community of Interest** – This concept was discussed at the recent event in Monymusk Village Hall on Monday 7th September. GNE inferred that a community of interest of 20 people have raised this issue of CAT and applying to FLS to lease the land for this biking development. They mentioned that of the twenty people ten were from Monymusk. This is all very good but a survey of 425 people in the Monymusk AB51 area led to 247 responses. 217 people were against the GNE development, 5 were undecided and 25 were in favour of the development. This data tells me there is a **"community of interest"** who do not want this GNE development on Pitfichie Hill and FLS must be cognisant of this.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Sent from my iPhone

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

Letter of Objection

The Gravitare North East plans for Pitfichie would, in theory, be exciting — a potential asset to the local community and a place for people to get outdoors and try new activities. Unfortunately, that is not the situation we are in. As proposed, the development poses real and significant risks to our local community.

Gravitare North East initially presented the idea of an inclusive bike park: a place for all ages and abilities to practise and improve their mountain biking skills, enjoying exercise in the fresh air. While this concept sounds positive, it does not reflect what is actually proposed. The CAT documents submitted to Forestry and Land Scotland describe two new “gravity-focused” downhill trails, designed for riders capable of handling advanced, extreme terrain. There is no mention of beginner trails or skill loops, despite public claims that the park would be suitable for school-age children. The plans therefore do not represent an inclusive community facility, but rather a specialist venue aimed at a small subset of elite riders. This raises a legitimate question: does this development truly benefit the wider community, or only a select few?

This leads to my first point of objection: Pitfichie Hill is a multi-use site. Forestry and Land Scotland’s own management plans identify Pitfichie as a forest used by walkers, runners, dog owners, families, and wildlife observers — not just cyclists. Any development must consider how increased high-speed cycling, uplift vehicles, and event activity would affect other users. Increased vehicle movements on forest roads and paths pose clear risks to dog walkers, young children, elderly residents, and vulnerable individuals. As a resident [REDACTED] [REDACTED] daily use by elderly people, families, and someone with a significant disability — all of whom enjoy walking in the surrounding area. I myself am an avid runner and hiker and Pitfichie hill is the perfect place for such hobbies, as per the reason we chose to move here. If these plans proposed by gravitate were to come into action, on a personal level, I would be extremely upset as the tranquillity and quiet character of the forest and hill would be permanently changed. I know many long standing neighbours would strongly agree.

There is also the major issue of the single-track access road. The road is extremely narrow, has limited passing places, and features deep drainage ditches on both sides. It is used daily by at least three farms, as well as two school transport runs. Adding substantial additional traffic — including uplift vans and visitor vehicles — would create serious congestion and safety risks. Creating new passing places is not straightforward either: fibre-optic infrastructure was recently installed along the verges, making alterations technically difficult and potentially damaging. Therefore, increased traffic pile ups would cause long delays and make the road significantly more hazardous for pedestrians, including children and vulnerable users who have the right to walk safely.

We are also fortunate to live among exceptional wildlife, all of which would be negatively affected by the proposed development. The area supports red squirrels, pine martens, nesting osprey, otters, foxes, weasels, stoats, deer, badgers, hares, mountain grouse, kites, crossbill, lizards, and hundreds of woodland, meadow, and river bird species. Several of these — including red squirrels, pine martens, and crossbill — are recognised as Scottish Biodiversity Priority species. For example, Red squirrels are a protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Pine martens — a recovering but still vulnerable species that relies on quiet, connected woodland habitat. Crossbill (Scottish crossbill) is the UK's only endemic bird species, found in mature conifer forests like Pitfichie. So removing said habitats would drive away these amazing animals that urgently need to be protected. Pitfichie provides a rare and irreplaceable habitat for many of these animals, including species that rely on quiet, undisturbed forest conditions. Increased noise, footfall, vehicle movements, and event activity would disrupt breeding, feeding, and survival. The proposal also sits within a 15.5-hectare biodiversity corridor identified in GNE's own Biodiversity Plan, an area currently regenerating after Storm Arwen. Disturbing this recovering habitat risks long-term ecological damage. As the landowner, Forestry and Land Scotland has a responsibility to protect wildlife and maintain sustainable forest management. I urge you to uphold that duty and safeguard the species that depend on this environment.

Overall, I strongly believe that the Gravitare North East proposal is poorly conceived and would provide no meaningful benefit to the community of Monymusk — neither recreational nor economic. Instead, it would introduce irreversible environmental damage, increased safety risks, and significant disruption to residents and wildlife. For the reasons outlined above, I stand by my objection and ask that you fully consider the long-term impacts this development would have on Pitfichie Hill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

From: [REDACTED]
 To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
 Subject: FORMAL OBJECTION: Pitfichie Hill Bike Trails and Car Park Asset Transfer Request (Gravitate North East)
 Date: 18 September 2026 10:13:16

Dear Forestry and Land Scotland Communities Team,
 Please find below my formal representation objecting to the Community Asset Transfer Request submitted by **Gravitate North East (GNE)** for the proposed lease at **Pitfichie Hill**. This objection is submitted in accordance with the statutory consultation process under the **Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015**.

While I support the sustainable development of outdoor recreation in Aberdeenshire, I believe this application does not provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the statutory requirements set out in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 have been met. In particular, I have concerns regarding the adequacy of community consultation, the robustness of the financial forecasts, and whether the application demonstrates a mandate that reflects the wider public interest.

1. Failure to Demonstrate Community Mandate and Support

Under **Section 82** of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, a Community Asset Transfer should demonstrate clear community support and robust community control. In my view, GNE's application does not provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate this requirement has been met, relying principally on a pre-feasibility user consultation survey that yielded 82 responses.

Deficit in the Community of Interest Mandate

Based on data from Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland (DMBinS), approximately **7% of the Scottish population** regularly rides bicycles off-road. GNE's constitution defines its community as "*people with an interest in mountain biking living in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire*" (total population for this area approx. 490,000 people), although it is unclear whether this refers to all mountain bikers or primarily gravity-focused riders.

Assuming these mountain bikers are a subset of the wider regional population of off-road cyclists, a sample size of **82 responses** may be insufficient to provide statistically reliable conclusions regarding community support. The resulting margin of error significantly limits the confidence that can be placed in the survey findings and raises questions as to whether a meaningful mandate has been demonstrated within the stated community of interest.

Deficit in the Geographic Community Mandate

A review of Appendix 1 (Pre-Feasibility Survey Data) also raises concerns regarding the suitability of the survey as a measure of local community support:

- **Lack of Objective Verifiable Data:** The survey does not include objective geographic identifiers such as postcodes (partial or full) or Community Council boundaries.
- **Subjective and Vague Phrasing:** The question "*Do you live locally?*" is open to interpretation. A frequent visitor residing in Aberdeen City may reasonably consider themselves "local" due to regular use of the site, creating uncertainty when attempting to distinguish between those living within the immediate Monymusk area and those visiting from elsewhere.
- **Devalued Residency Metrics:** Because the survey does not define the "*Monymusk / Pitfichie area*", the associated question regarding length of residency is difficult to interpret and has limited analytical value.

Taken together, these factors suggest the survey is affected by selection bias and does not adequately capture the views of the community of interest or indeed residents living closest to the proposed development. Forestry and Land Scotland guidance requires consideration of those communities most directly affected by changes to the asset. By

not clearly separating the views of local residents from those of the wider visiting cycling community, the survey provides very limited evidence of user interest but does not demonstrate a sufficiently robust local community mandate.

2. Potential Impact on Public Benefit and Existing Users

Section 82 of the Act requires consideration of any benefits arising from a proposed transfer alongside any adverse impacts on existing public use of the site. Given the limitations of the consultation exercise, I do not believe the application adequately assesses the needs and interests of current forest users.

Impact on Traditional Multi-Use Groups

Pitfichie Forest is a well-used public asset utilised by hillwalkers, equestrians, runners, mountain bikers, and other recreational users. Existing tracks, including the route around Cairn William, function as shared-access recreation spaces.

The introduction of a formal riders' paddock and dedicated downhill trail infrastructure would alter the current balance of uses within the forest. As downhill mountain biking involves higher speeds and more specialist infrastructure requirements, the proposal may increase the potential for user conflict and could discourage use by some existing user groups. This raises questions as to whether the overall public benefit currently provided by the forest would be maintained.

Failure to Assess Localised Infrastructure and Community Impact

The application appears to provide limited assessment of impacts on the wider Monymusk area. Forestry and Land Scotland has a responsibility to ensure that public asset transfers do not create disproportionate impacts on surrounding communities. Increased visitor numbers, organised events, and uplift-related activities could result in additional traffic on minor rural roads serving Pitfichie Hill and Monymusk. However, it is unclear whether local residents have been adequately consulted regarding these potential impacts. In the absence of a comprehensive and independent Environmental Impact Assessment, Traffic Impact Assessment, or Multi-Use Conflict Assessment, I do not believe sufficient evidence has been presented to demonstrate that the proposal would deliver a net public benefit without adversely affecting existing users or nearby residents.

3. Concerns Regarding Economic and Long-Term Sustainability

A proposed **25-year lease** represents a significant long-term commitment involving a public asset. Such a commitment should be supported by a robust, risk-assessed business case with realistic assumptions regarding visitor numbers, income generation, and maintenance liabilities.

If the financial projections, maintenance budgets, and visitor forecasts are substantially based upon the limited consultation data, there is a risk that the underlying assumptions are not sufficiently reliable. This concern is reinforced by the apparent absence of the project from the published list of Just Transition Fund for the North East and Moray funding awards dated 1 September 2026.

Visitor Projections and Infrastructure Pressures

The application relies heavily on projected visitor numbers to support its financial case. If visitor numbers are lower than anticipated, the financial sustainability of the project will be severely affected. Conversely, if visitor numbers meet ambitious growth projections, additional pressure will be placed on local infrastructure, particularly the rural road network serving Pitfichie Hill. I have not identified evidence within the application of a professional traffic impact assessment or a fully funded strategy to address long-term impacts on local access routes.

Long-Term Maintenance Risk and Public Liability

Mountain bike trail infrastructure requires ongoing inspection, maintenance, and environmental management, particularly where trails experience intensive use or are exposed to severe weather conditions.

An example of this financial risk is visible in the project's financial business plan spreadsheet, which allocates a total lifecycle, decommissioning, and storm reserve of £15,000. For a project requiring a substantial initial capital expenditure, setting aside a total reserve of about 1.5% of the initial build cost would appear to be risky and perhaps unrealistic.

Furthermore, backloading this reserve by accumulating it at a rate of just £5,000 per year over the first three years leaves the development highly vulnerable to early operational failure. A single severe winter storm or structural infrastructure issue in Year 1 would instantly exhaust a £5,000 balance. Restoring a 1.24-hectare forest site, breaking up car parks, and removing modular toilet blocks at the end of a lease requires heavy machinery and commercial contracting that will significantly exceed £15,000, leaving no capital for site remediation and potentially forcing FLS to step in as a financial backstop.

The application does not appear to demonstrate a guaranteed recurring revenue stream sufficient to support maintenance obligations throughout the proposed 25-year lease period. Furthermore, GNE has not provided an options appraisal addressing alternative site selections or contingency arrangements should projected income fail to materialise. If the project becomes financially unsustainable, there is an unacceptably high risk that Forestry and Land Scotland could ultimately inherit liabilities associated with trail remediation, infrastructure removal, or environmental restoration. For this reason, further evidence is required before concluding that the proposal represents a sustainable long-term use of a public asset.

Conclusion and Requested Action

For an asset transfer of this scale and duration, there should be clear, transparent, and representative evidence of community support, together with a robust assessment of environmental, infrastructure, and financial implications.

Based on the information currently available, I do not believe that the applicant has provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate that these requirements have been met.

I therefore respectfully request that Forestry and Land Scotland either **reject the application** or **defer consideration of the proposal** pending the completion of an independent and statistically robust consultation process, together with appropriate assessments of projected traffic, environmental impacts, multi-use access considerations, and long-term financial sustainability.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this representation.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Objection to Gravitate North East asset transfer request for land on Pitfichie Hill, Monymusk
Date: 18 September 2026 10:53:33

To whom it may concern:
My comments below relate to Gravitate North East’s proposal to use the land at Pitfichie for the creation of a car park, riders paddock area and two downhill mountain bike trails. In addition, their intention to use FLS forest roads in this area for the transport of mountain bikes to the top of the downhill trail by 4x4 vehicles of an unspecified type.

The site at Pitfichie has been managed as a commercial timber producing forest for decades, with established tracks used by mountain bikers, walkers and horse-riders. Over the years, commercial forestry and public recreation have coexisted, helping create a species-rich ecosystem. The current application for a Community Asset Transfer lease to develop a commercial downhill uplift mountain biking centre should be rejected because it would be to the detriment of local flora and fauna, as well as the many people who value and enjoy the area.

Based on personal observation and local knowledge, several raptor species nest or live around the proposed Pitfichie downhill mountain biking site, including osprey, goshawk, tawny owl, red kite, sparrowhawk and merlin. The application does not appear to include a raptor survey, nor evidence that the Scottish Raptor Study Group or the RSPB, aside from a local volunteer, were consulted for data or professional advice.

Northern goshawks are classified as Green in the UK under Birds of Conservation Concern 5: The Red List for Birds (2021) and are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. During the breeding season, they require a 500m disturbance-free corridor: <https://www.nature.scot/doc/naturescot-research-report-1283-disturbance-distances-review-updated-literature-review-disturbance>

A raptor survey should be completed over a period of 12 months, with its findings reflected in the biodiversity plan. Numerous ground-nesting bird species may also be at risk during the April–August breeding season due to disturbance away from established paths.

In addition to increased downhill mountain biking activity and large-scale public events, the site would face further disturbance and pollution from the uplift 4x4 vehicles using forest roads from Thursday to Sunday for 50 weeks of the year. I would ask the panel to seriously consider the impact of this development on the wildlife in the area and request that adequate professional surveys are carried out both before any activity and throughout the life of the proposed lease should the application be successful.

Yours
[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
 To: [Forestry FLS Communities](mailto:secretarycmmcc@gmail.com)
 Cc: secretarycmmcc@gmail.com
 Subject: OBJECTION to Community Asset Transfer - downhill centre at Pitfichie
 Date: 18 September 2026 11:39:24

I would like to strongly object to the proposed transfer of land to GNE for the purposes of developing a small area of the hill for use exclusively by Mountain bikers.

This process is called a "community" asset transfer which suggests it is for the "local community". In this case, although the application suggests it benefits the local community the reality is that with the exception of a handful of local mountain biking supporters, the vast majority of local residents, who will be directly impacted, are strongly against this transfer. The community referred to throughout this community asset transfer application are not the "local community", rather they are a mountain biking community, the vast majority of whom do not live in the "local community" and will not experience any of the adverse impacts of this proposed asset transfer development. If Community Asset Transfers are supposed to be for the good of the "local community", this transfer should not go ahead.

The "local community" already use Pitfichie Hill for walking and mountain biking and have done for years, without having to pay or compete with folks who will travel in from all over Aberdeenshire and beyond to use it. This will only benefit GNE and not the "local Monymusk community" and if it is allowed to go ahead will make a mockery of the intent of Community Asset Transfer.

My concerns are as follows.

Carparking for 75 vehicles suggests GNE are expecting 75 vehicles to require using the car park and access roads each hour or so on a regular basis. 75 vehicles every hour or so would mean between 40 to 80 vehicles every hour using the access road, which is currently a 60mph single lane section of road with passing places. As a resident of the glen where the car park is planned, that means the 5-minute car journey from the forest access road to the junction to Monymusk will now involve meeting at least 5 vehicles coming in the opposite direction with one of them having to reverse to a passing space. My experience is that the mountain biking car owners do not yield and they wait for the local residents to reverse. Likewise, I suspect these passing places will have cars parked in them with people avoiding the parking charges associated with the car park. Not only will this exponentially increase the times it takes local residents to access / egress their properties, it is also an accident waiting to happen, especially when you add the blind corner at Paradise Woods and the "local community" walkers / cyclists, who frequently walk/cycle this stretch of road. Add potholes and ice / snow to this equation and the proposal for the location of the carpark, with the available access, is completely unacceptable. Even half this number of vehicles on a regular basis would still present a significant risk on these roads.

If GNE are not expecting this volume of users, the car park does not need to be this size. An overflow carpark is discussed for use during events.

Having someone in the village to phone to chastise people from parking in the passing places will not mitigate the issue nor avoid the potential for accidents.

Fundamentally, the location of the carpark and the available access road is inappropriate. The section of road from the entrance to Pitfichie Forest to Paradise Woods gets horribly icy in the winter and encouraging people to use this section of road during the winter is wholly irresponsible.

Having a motorised vehicle taking mountain bikes and their riders up to the top of the hill will spoil the tranquillity of the area. It will also mask the illegal use of the hill by individuals on other motorised forms of transport. It will disturb wildlife and deter the "local community" from using the hill for peaceful walks and periods of mindfulness. I also believe the motorised vehicle will be diesel, which does not fit with the claimed green nature of the GNE application.

There are minimal local businesses in Monymusk that will see any benefit from this development (maybe one).

The nearest shop is in Kemnay who may see some increase in business but there will be no positive impact to the "local Monymusk community".

The intent to clear the car park of rubbish once a week is insufficient. It demonstrates the tick box exercise that has been completed to appear to address issues rather than truly thinking them through. It is windy on Pitfichie Hill most of the time. Consequently, most of the rubbish will have dispersed in the wind leaving the local amenity and the "local community" strewn with rubbish rather than cleared.

The survey referred to in the application was a limited survey which I believe was shared on social media, which is clearly used more by the mountain biking community than the "local community". When fliers were shared door to door amongst the "local community" in a real attempt to assess support or otherwise for the asset transfer and development, the response from the "local community" was overwhelmingly against.

GNE say throughout the transfer application that they will act on the feedback of local residents but to date they have shown no evidence of being willing to do this. They have tried to make the mountain biking community support sound like "local community" support and in doing so have ignored all the concerns of the "local community". At a meeting between the "local community", GNE and FLS, the "local community" were not allowed to ask questions, rather they had to submit questions in advance. Then during the meeting, it was shared that there would not be time to answer all of the questions rather just a selection would be addressed. The "local community" feel silenced and excluded from a process which is being railroaded through by GNE & FLS against the will of most of the "local community".

All the above access concerns have been shared with GNE and yet nothing about the plan has been changed, no concerns addressed. It is therefore certain that should this asset transfer and development go ahead there will be no listening to feedback from the "local community".

[REDACTED] the GNE representative to share one positive impact of this asset transfer and development for the "local community", and he was unable [REDACTED] a single example.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [redacted]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Objection - Pitfichie Asset Transfer Request
Date: 18 September 2026 11:45:05
Attachments: [image002.jpg](#)
[image005.jpg](#)
[image007.jpg](#)
[image009.jpg](#)

Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to object to this application in its current form due to a lack of information being made available to the public to allow proper and informed assessment of the project. FLS should request that the applicant withdraw the application and ask them to address the many raised issues in the representations that have been sent in. Only once these are addressed should there be any consideration to submitting the proposal again.

Having listened and read many representations on this project, what has become clear is that there are many missing pieces of critical information that prevent the public from making a proper assessment of the project

The forest is going nowhere, and neither are FLS, so there is no urgency there

The urgency lies entirely with GNE, and as the representations to FLS and Aberdeenshire Council have shown, there are many material points not addressed and answered in the documentation presented by GNE to FLS and Aberdeenshire Council

This lack of thoroughness and attention to detail does not inspire confidence in the applicants ability to run the site, irrespective of how virtuous the project may appear

I would also comment that had a full iterative consultation with the community been done prior to final submission, a lot of the raised issues would have been highlighted and hopefully addressed

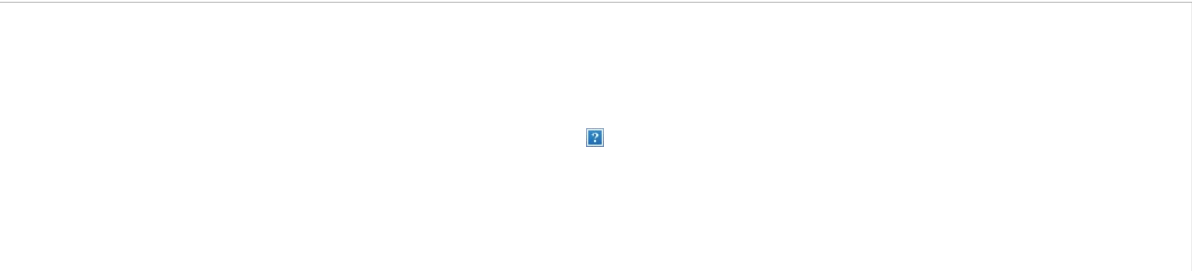
This was not done, and as things stand, these unforced errors have caused significant discontent in an appreciable part of the local community which will take a lot to undo

Even a cursory review of the application shows some glaring gaps in knowledge and information which imply that this was a unnecessarily rushed application

For example, it is acknowledged that there needs to be upgrade work done on the single track road leading up to the car park

However, there is no allocation in the financial statement for the potentially very substantial cost involved in upgrading this road – and that is before you bring in the question of land ownership of the land that would be required to build these upgrades

Again no mention in the documentation of this being investigated



There also needs to be a lot more clarity regarding the car park, especially with how overflow parking would be handled

There is no evidence to show that the local estate or the local farmer would help in this regard

So evidence shows the existing car park would be the sole parking site for events

If the car park was approved by Aberdeenshire Council, it is likely that there would be planning conditions set that the maximum capacity would be 76 cars (as requested in the GNE planning application) - anymore would be a material legal breach of planning conditions

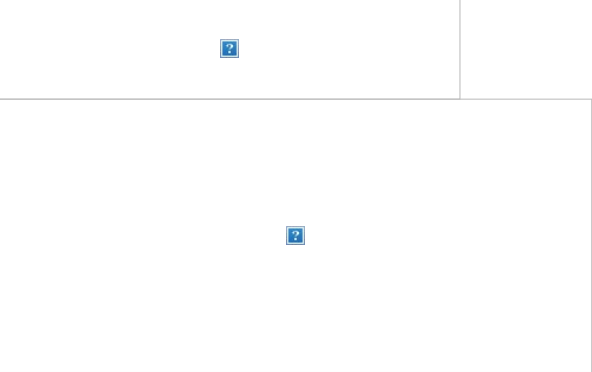
However, it was stated in the public meeting on Mon 7th Sept by GNE that if they were unable to have overspill parking, they would either cancel the event or push the limit on an event day to 100+ cars

Not only is that capacity flexing likely to be not legally allowed, it just guarantees conflict with neighbouring properties as attendees try and find parking in laybys, field access points etc – especially if they have no desire to pay a parking charge

Again, another example of not doing proper research prior to submission

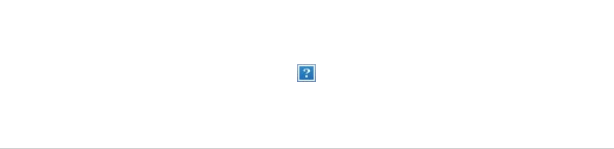
I would also note that there is confusion regarding when the car park would even be available

The Site Operations Plan indicates that overnight parking is discouraged, suggesting that the car park would be open at all times



Then there is a statement that implies that the car park would be only open when the uplift service is running – so in theory the car park closed completely for 3 days of the week So which is true?

Again, poor attention to detail that has led onto a lot of public irritation and annoyance at a perceived loss of access to accommodate just one user group



Alas this is a more detailed review of just one aspect of the proposal

As FLS will have seen in already submitted detailed objection representations, similar errors are seen in other aspects like trail construction, raptor studies etc

Regards

[redacted signature block]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses

107

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Support for asset transfer - Pitfichie
Date: 18 September 2026 14:36:00

Good afternoon,

I am contacting you in regards to the asset transfer request for Pitfichie to Gravitare.

[REDACTED]. We love living in a more rural setting, and enjoy taking our dog for walks in surrounding areas.

I would like to express my support for Gravitare being granted the asset transfer. I understand that some people in the local community have concerns regarding Gravitare. [REDACTED] how well Gravitare has spoken/answered questions, and the policy's they have in place, I believe it will be a positive change.

[REDACTED]. Apart from the Arthur Grant Centre, there is not much locally to do with children, unless you can drive or are willing to travel. It would be very convenient to have something so local to do, without having to travel 30+ minutes. I feel that the bike trails will help with the local economy (at the Grant Arms, Charity shop, Double Dot Art, and other businesses in the surrounding areas), but also the bike trails will provide for activities in the area for children and will hopefully keep them occupied during school holidays etc.

I also believe that if Gravitare receives the asset transfer, they will take great care of the existing trails, and perform much needed upkeep, making it safer for all cyclists.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

Subject: Pitfichie Hill Downhill Biking Project - OBJECTION

We **strongly object** to this proposal by Gravitare North East (GNE) for Community Asset Transfer (CAT) of a proportion of the Pitfichie Hill, Monymusk from Forestry Land Scotland (FLS) to GNE for further development of downhill biking trails and car parking with associated facilities.

1. Community Support: based on the feedback we have received from friends and acquaintances in the area following representations by GNE in the Monymusk Village Hall, we consider that local support is low.
2. We do not consider the applicant has clearly defined how the local community will benefit from their proposal.
3. Many questions remain to be clarified regarding the visitor numbers and where the existing assumptions originate; what is the demand based upon; are we sure this is a financially viable project?
4. As far as I can see from the application, the main difference between the existing trail network and the new project with additional trails is the inclusion of an uplift system requiring the need for vehicles to transfer riders and their bikes to a location close to the summit of Pitfichie Hill. Given this is a primary driver for the success of the project, then I am surprised at the lack of detail in the application. What vehicle type, detailed routing, finances etc?
5. A primary concern which will affect my own use of the hill, is access for all users including walkers and hikers, horse riders, other cyclists; individually, as groups and as family groups. Today I consider it safe to allow children to walk or cycle freely on the forest tracks. Will this freedom remain?
6. It is not clear to me what are the exact boundaries of the CAT application. There is a map but also text which contradicts the limits set by the map.
7. I do not believe that a limited survey of the ecology undertaken in the winter months is representative. I consider this to be representative of the low importance which the applicant has for the ecology of Pitfichie Hill.
8. Then there is the additional traffic, the majority of which must pass through the village of Monymusk and ALL of which must traverse a single-track road with limited passing places. How will this increase in traffic noise, dangers to other road users (walkers, cyclists....) be mitigated? This will be worse during "events" when visitor numbers will increase considerably.

We hope you will consider these points in your assessment and not approve this CAT application.

Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS): Objection

I am writing to register my objection to the application made by Gravitare North East (GNE) for an asset transfer request for a 25-year lease for 1.24 hectares of land at Pitfichie Hill, Monymusk for the purpose of creating a car park, riders paddock area and two mountain bike trails.

1. Relationship to the area and community

My relationship to the location/application is that I am a CEO of Monymusk Estate [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] various neighbours and tenants living along the single track road described as U122C, many of whom depend on the private water supplies which are fed from the Protected Drinking Water Area which the car park would lie within. Monymusk Estate farm the field immediately below the proposed car park location and we also manage the river bank below and the SSSI Paradise Wood; I will outline below the impacts on these various habitats/resources posed by the proposed car park development.

2. Failure to Deliver "Community Benefit"

Lack of Broad Benefit: The proposed car park only serves the interests of a narrow sector of the biking industry rather than the wider public.

- Early in the discussions Monymusk Estate were quick to offer an alternative location which would have significantly widened the use of the car park & facilities to other cycling and community groups such as:
 - the road cyclists who routinely use the C121C and U121C roads as part of their looped routes but rarely use the U122C road since that is a 'dead end' for them,
 - toddlers and younger children who would have been able to make use of a pump track the estate were keen to install as part of the development,
 - horse riders who would have been afforded more space and dedicated facilities in this car park,
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But none of the above groups seemed to be a priority for GNE as they told us that the most important feature for them remained as being only the proximity of the finish line to the steepest gradient for the maximum 'wow factor' for those partaking in the downhill biking events.

- Monymusk Estate donated £3,000 to enable a survey of another more suitable car park location offering:
 - lower ecological impact,
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However, even after the survey confirmed the location as suitable for a car park, GNE decided to go ahead with their original location making no changes.

Despite our attempts to widen the utilisation options for the car park, GNE continue to focus narrowly on the downhill mountain bike community and to ignore aspects of their design which significantly impact other users and neighbours.

Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS): Objection

Negative Social Impact: Previous events held at and coordinated from hillside finish location on Pitfichie Hill have caused antisocial behaviour, overnight vehicle issues, litter and noise that has affected other users and neighbours.

There have been three biking events run so far in 2026 and it is of great significance to compare the outcome of these:

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 - Fences were being climbed rather than using the agreed access route.
 - Tenants had to redirect a lost ambulance which had been summoned to the event but was unable to find the parking location or to identify marshalls for directions.
 - Neighbours also reported:
 - Bikers urinating on their property boundaries
 - Difficulties with the volume of cars using the single track U122C road
 - Excessive noise from hand operated horns and whistles which were used at the event from 10am – 6.30pm; this affected neighbouring properties but also multiple properties along the Lord’s Throat road the other side of the river Don at least as far upstream as Place of Tillyfour
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 - It was later claimed by relatives of the van owner that they were simply there to swim in the river and it was just a coincidence that they were parked 0.5mile from this impromptu biking event
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 - Overnight camping within the FLS area (rooftents were photographed fully erect on car roofs the following morning)
 - Excessive noise and music occurring within 100m of a protected goshawk nest causing distress to the birds and foul language from the bikers directed at the neighbours when they pleaded with the bikers to make less noise and move out of the 400m buffer zone to protect the birds (eventually they did move further along the track).

The difference between the first event of the year where both car parking and coordination occurred outwith the forestry at Pitfichie Farm and adjacent field versus the subsequent two events where the car parking was at the hillside finish location on Pitfichie Hill speaks for itself.

Why are GNE not making adjustments to their plans based on these different experiences? GNE are refusing to mitigate for any of these Negative Social Impacts even with the perfect solution still available to them.

Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS): Objection

Environmental and Ecological Harm:

Previous events held at and coordinated from hillside finish location on Pitfichie Hill have caused disturbance to protected wildlife:

- 9/10 May – Enduro event – with car parking and coordination off the hillside at Pitfichie Farm
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Furthermore there is a significant risk to the water supplies of neighbouring residents whose water is sourced from within the proposed area of development. Sufficient buffer zones have not been met.

Flaws in Financial and Operational Sustainability:

I have strong concerns about the proposed funding for this venture since GNE have admitted to not having identified solutions for several items which will comprise major costs:

- over flow parking,
- overnight parking,
- vehicle storage solutions
- new/expanded passing places

Additionally, the proposed parking charges and ability to close the car park leaving will leave no alternative for current users. The result will inevitably be these visitor's parking their cars along the single track U122C road, blocking up agricultural field entrances and neighbours' access points which will be strongly detrimental to the area and community.

Traffic, Safety, and Access Issues:

The plans submitted relies heavily on 'existing passing opportunities' along the single track U122C road which the public have no right to use and which could be blocked or made unusable at any time. Almost every location is

Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS): Objection

severely limited in its potential for expansion and neighbours / landowners have no intention of allowing alteration/expansion or continued usage of these locations.

The plans submitted also show new / extended passing places which are not possible without expanding onto land owned by Monymusk Estate, who have no intention of allowing this.

Conclusion and Actionable Request

Monymusk Estate cannot, in good conscience, support a car park at the proposed location within the forestry since the application fails to meet the sustainability, best-value, and community benefit duties required under FLS CATS Evaluation Guidance.

We will not, therefore, be allowing any form of the following on our land or property to operate alongside a car park located within the FLS:

- over flow parking,
- overnight parking,
- vehicle storage solutions
- new/expanded passing places or
- pop up weekend camping.

I formally request that the independent evaluation panel reject the asset transfer request.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Downhill biking Centre Tillyfourie Monymusk
Date: 18 September 2026 17:14:21

We wish to express our objection to the proposal as this will spoil the lovely walking area at Pitfichie. We feel having motorised vehicles to take bicycles up the hill will spoil the tranquillity and is detrimental to wildlife. We live in the area and the roads local to Monymusk and Pitfichie are not suitable for that volume of traffic.

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Pitfichie Hill Downhill Bike Trails - Objection
Date: 18 September 2026 17:45:30

Dear Sir/Madam

We **strongly object** to this proposal by Gravitate North East (GNE) for Community Asset Transfer (CAT) of a proportion of the Pitfichie Hill, Monymusk from Forestry Land Scotland (FLS) to GNE for further development of downhill biking trails and car parking with associated facilities.

We consider the following as our primary reasons for objection to this proposal.

1. Community Support: based on the feedback we have received from friends and acquaintances in the area following representations by GNE in the Monymusk Village Hall, we consider that local support is low.
2. We do not consider the applicant has clearly defined how the local community will benefit from their proposal.
3. Many questions remain to be clarified regarding the visitor numbers and where the existing assumptions originate; what is the demand based upon; are we sure this is a financially viable project?
4. As far as I can see from the application, the main difference between the existing trail network and the new project with additional trails is the inclusion of an uplift system requiring the need for vehicles to transfer riders and their bikes to a location close to the summit of Pitfichie Hill. Given this is a primary driver for the success of the project, then I am surprised at the lack of detail in the application. What vehicle type, detailed routing, finances etc?
5. A primary concern which will affect my own use of the hill, is access for all users including walkers and hikers, horse riders, other cyclists; individually, as groups and as family groups. Today I consider it safe to allow children to walk or cycle freely on the forest tracks. Will this freedom remain?
6. It is not clear to me what are the exact boundaries of the CAT application. There is a map but also text which contradicts the limits set by the map.
7. I do not believe that a limited survey of the ecology undertaken in the winter months is representative. I consider this to be representative of the low importance which the applicant has for the ecology of Pitfichie Hill.
8. Then there is the additional traffic, the majority of which must pass through the village of Monymusk and ALL of which must traverse a single-track road with limited passing places. How will this increase in traffic noise, dangers to other road users (walkers, cyclists....) be mitigated? This will be worse during "events" when visitor numbers will increase considerably.

We hope you will consider these points in your assessment and not approve this CAT application.

Regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

111

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS): Objection
Date: 18 September 2026 22:16:52
Attachments: [Community Asset Transfer Scheme \(CATS\) - Response.docx](#)

Dear Sir/Madam,

I would be pleased if you could note my Objection to the CATS application by Gravitare North East.

Yours faithfully

[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

I am writing to register my objection to the application made by Gravitare North East (GNE) for an asset transfer request for a 25-year lease for 1.24 hectares of land at Pitfichie Hill, Monymusk for the purpose of creating a car park, riders paddock area and two mountain bike trails.

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My relationship to the location/application is that I am a CEO of Monymusk Estate [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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- overnight parking,
- vehicle storage solutions
- new/expanded passing places or
- pop up weekend camping.

I formally request that the independent evaluation panel reject the asset transfer request.

LETTER OF SUPPORT**GRAVITATE PITFICHIE PROJECT**

As a mountain bike coach and rider, I have experience of riding and coaching at Pitfichie and know the value of its existing trails for developing skills, confidence and bike handling. I believe the proposed development could build significantly on this by creating purpose-built trails and facilities that also consider coaching and rider progression within their design.

From a coaching perspective, having areas where riders can safely practice, repeat and progressively develop specific skills would be extremely valuable. Features designed with appropriate stopping areas, run-outs and natural progression would allow coaches to deliver more structured and effective sessions, particularly for downhill and gravity riding.

A significant proportion of my coaching clients have been women, girls and younger riders, and it has been fantastic to see their enthusiasm, confidence and ability develop through coaching. Providing facilities that support structured progression and longer coaching sessions would help create more opportunities for these riders to continue developing their skills and remain engaged in the sport. Practical facilities such as dedicated parking and toilets would also make longer coaching sessions more accessible and attractive to riders and their families.

Effective coaching is largely about being safer whilst riding gravity MTB disciplines. More effective coaching facilities will result in more effective coaching delivery, and in due course a safer local riding community with a lower risk level. This creates a better MTB experience at Pitfichie for all stakeholders.

I fully support the Gravitare Pitfichie project and believe the proposed development would provide significant benefits for mountain biking and the local community. I would welcome its progression through the CATS process and subsequent planning application.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED] (Mountain Bike Coach)

Address: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SUMMARY

Below are nine signatures and seven supporting statements from members of my local network of clients, demonstrating support for the proposed Community Asset Transfer of Pitfichie Hill.

The statements reflect the value that riders and families place on the hill and the potential benefits of improved downhill facilities.

CLIENT / PARENT OR GUARDIAN STATEMENT

I have read the above letter and support the proposed Gravitare Pitfichie project and the benefits it could provide for riders and coaching.

Printed name: _____

Address:

Email address:

Optional comment from my perspective as a rider, parent or guardian:

As both a rider and coach, I fully support the Gravitare Pitfichie project. The development would provide a safe and accessible environment for mountain bike skills development for riders of all ages and abilities, addressing a significant gap in provision within this part of Aberdeenshire.

Despite Pitfichie being a well-established and popular mountain biking destination for many years, the existing infrastructure has not kept pace with its use. Parking facilities are currently inadequate, with only a limited number of spaces available and restricted room to safely manoeuvre vehicles during busy periods.

The proposed addition of toilet facilities would also be a particularly welcome improvement, helping to make the site more inclusive and accessible, especially for female riders, families, and visitors travelling from further afield.

Overall, the project would significantly enhance the experience for current users while encouraging wider participation in mountain biking and outdoor recreation within the local community.

Date: _____14/09/2026_____

.....

CLIENT / PARENT OR GUARDIAN STATEMENT

I have read the above letter and support the proposed Gravitare Pitfichie project and the benefits it could provide for riders and coaching.

Printed name: _____

Address:

Email address:

Optional comment from my perspective as a rider, parent or guardian:

The proposed new project in Pitfichie will be beneficial to all riders as it provides more trails with new features. This will allow skilled development in a safe and controlled environment. I also think it will be great to have toilets there too.

Date: _____14/092026_____

.....

CLIENT / PARENT OR GUARDIAN STATEMENT

I have read the above letter and support the proposed Gravitare Pitfichie project and the benefits it could provide for riders and coaching.

Printed name: _____

Address:



Email address:

Optional comment from my perspective as a rider, parent or guardian:

Agree with everything. As a family of mountain bikers, we strongly support the Gravitare Pitfichie project. We believe the proposed development would be a fantastic addition to the area, creating a safe, welcoming place for families and riders of all abilities to learn, progress and enjoy mountain biking.

Date: _____ 4.9.26 _____

.....

CLIENT / PARENT OR GUARDIAN STATEMENT

I have read the above letter and support the proposed Gravitare Pitfichie project and the benefits it could provide for riders and coaching.

Printed name:

Address:

Email address:

Optional comment from my perspective as a rider, parent or guardian:

I am fully supportive of the development of pitfichie. A proper car park is desperately needed, it will be great to have a group properly managing the trail system. It will also be fantastic for local guides and coaches to have better facilities and areas to coach.

Date: 8/9/2026

.....

CLIENT / PARENT OR GUARDIAN STATEMENT

I have read the above letter and support the proposed Gravitare Pitfichie project and the benefits it could provide for riders and coaching.

Printed name: [REDACTED] _____

Address:

[REDACTED]

Email address:

[REDACTED] _____

Optional comment from my perspective as a rider, parent or guardian:

As a parent of one keen mountain biker and another younger up and coming biker I've seen the health and mental well being benefits of then biking and in particular the friendly competition and camaraderie between riders in downhill competitions specifically. Having a better facility for them to train, practice and hold events on would be invaluable to them but also have economic benefits to the the local area and the wider North East of Scotland, which is an up-and-coming location for mountain biking and should be encouraged.

Date: ____ 15/09/2026 _____

.....

CLIENT / PARENT OR GUARDIAN STATEMENT

I have read the above letter and support the proposed Gravitare Pitfichie project and the benefits it could provide for riders and coaching.

Printed name: ____ [REDACTED] _____

Address:

[REDACTED]

Email address:

[REDACTED] _____

Optional comment from my perspective as a rider, parent or guardian:

Date: ____ 15/09/2026 _____

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CLIENT / PARENT OR GUARDIAN STATEMENT

I have read the above letter and support the proposed Gravitare Pitfichie project and the benefits it could provide for riders and coaching.

Printed name: _____

Address:

Email address:

Optional comment from my perspective as a rider, parent or guardian:

Date: ____15/09/2026_____

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CLIENT / PARENT OR GUARDIAN STATEMENT

I have read the above letter and support the proposed Gravitare Pitfichie project and the benefits it could provide for riders and coaching.

Printed name: _____

Address:

Email address: _____

Optional comment from my perspective as a rider, parent or guardian:

To whom it may concern,

I am writing in support of the Gravitare Pitfichie Project as the parent of a _____ mountain biker who regularly rides local trails and is passionate about developing their skills within the sport. Mountain biking provides children with far more than just recreation. It encourages physical activity, builds confidence, teaches resilience, and helps young people develop an appreciation for the outdoors. As a parent, I have seen first-hand how mountain biking has helped my child become more confident, independent, and active. One of the biggest challenges for young riders is finding safe, well-designed facilities that allow them to progress their skills in a structured way. The proposed development at Pitfichie would create an environment where children and young riders can gradually build their abilities on purpose-built trails designed with progression and safety in mind. This is particularly important for gravity and downhill riding, where appropriate trail design and supporting facilities can help reduce risk and encourage responsible riding. The project would also provide significant benefits for families. Having dedicated parking, facilities, and a managed riding area would make visits more accessible and enjoyable for parents and children alike. It would create a destination where families can spend quality time together while participating in a healthy

outdoor activity. Importantly, the development would help support the next generation of riders. Young people need opportunities to participate in positive activities that challenge them, promote wellbeing, and encourage social connections. Facilities such as those proposed at Pitfichie would provide these opportunities while helping to foster a strong and responsible mountain biking community.

As a parent, I strongly believe that the Gravitare Pitfichie Project would be a valuable investment in local recreation, youth development, and outdoor sport. It would provide a safe and sustainable place for young riders to learn, progress, and enjoy mountain biking for many years to come. I fully support the project and would welcome its progression through the necessary

.....

CLIENT / PARENT OR GUARDIAN STATEMENT

I have read the above letter and support the proposed Gravitare Pitfichie project and the benefits it could provide for riders and coaching.

Printed name: [REDACTED]

Address:

[REDACTED]

Email address: [REDACTED]

Optional comment from my perspective as a rider, parent or guardian:

[REDACTED] *I love mountain biking and I am writing to support the Gravitare Pitfichie Project. Mountain biking is one of my favourite things to do. It helps me stay active, spend time outdoors, and build confidence. I enjoy learning new skills and challenging myself to become a better rider. I think the proposed trails and facilities at Pitfichie would be amazing for young riders like me. Having trails designed for different skill levels would help children learn safely and improve step by step. It would also give us somewhere special to ride where we can practise and have fun with our friends and families. I think this project would encourage more children, especially girls, to try mountain biking. It can sometimes be difficult to find places where young riders feel comfortable building their confidence. A well-designed trail centre would make it easier for children to get involved and enjoy the sport. Mountain biking has taught me determination, resilience, and how to keep trying when something is difficult. I believe the Gravitare Pitfichie Project would give many other young people the chance to learn those skills too. I hope this project is approved because it would create a fantastic place for children and families to enjoy mountain biking, spend time outdoors, and be active together. Thank you for considering my support.*

Date: 06/09/2026