

13th February 2007

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Carron Valley Development Group
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Dear Mr Hislop

Mountain Bike Centre at Carron Valley

Many thanks for your letter dated 4th October 2006 regarding the above. Please accept my apologies for the delay in reverting back to you however, we have been waiting until we had tangible development to report back on.

Your letter coincided with the presentation of a Project Plan by Carron Valley Development Group to the Carron Valley Partnership on 5th October. This plan was endorsed by three of the signatories to the Carron Valley Partnership: Central Scotland Forest Trust, North Lanarkshire Council and Stirling Council. I have enclosed copies of both the presentation and the Project Plan for your perusal. CSFT are key to delivery of the project.

On 7th November the same presentation was given to Alan Stevenson and Michael Wall – District Manager FCS Scottish Lowlands. I wish to record our thanks for arranging for Mr Stevenson to meet with CVDG. At this meeting, CVDG obtained tacit approval from those present that Scottish Lowlands District would back the bulk of the plan and agreement that Alan Stevenson would “champion the project” within the FES Management Board. In order to deliver this, it was explained that a new member of staff would be recruited within Scottish Lowlands to head up Special Projects and the development and submission of our proposals would be one such project. This member of staff is now in post and is currently finalising the Project Initiation Document or PID with a view to submitting it to FES Management Board this week.

In terms of project delivery, it was also agreed that Central Scotland Forest Trust would spearhead Fundraising for the project and assume the Project Management role on behalf of the Carron Valley Partnership.

The foregoing is now a matter of record in the form of numerous e mail correspondences between myself and Michael Wall. CVDG are therefore pleased that this project has been taken to the next level however, the Project Plan has still to obtain backing by FES Board.

As you know, Mountain Biking has seen phenomenal growth as a sport in recent years and given further strategic support, Scotland is more than capable of producing world class athletes in the same way it has with track cycling. In your letter, you made mention of the success of FCS Mountain Bike developments however, without exception, these developments are being driven on the basis of a Tourism model and so by definition they are mostly in rural areas. The strategic positioning of Carron Valley makes it a different ball game entirely and CVDG naturally see this as a fantastic opportunity on two fundamental levels: sport and health.

CVDG has consistently argued that Central Scotland needs a MTB facility - one of suitable size and one that is easily accessible to where the bulk of our population actually live. As importantly, we have also argued that any such MTB facility should be accessible to ordinary people and in particular, newcomers to the sport. As you say, FCS has a remit to provide and manage recreation on our national forest estate and so it is worth noting the geographical spread of FCS Scottish Lowlands District. This encompasses over 70% of the Scottish population and yet there is no recreational facility of note in any of these forests. Carron Valley is right in the middle of Scottish Lowlands bailiwick and is but a stones throw from Scotland's largest city. The fact that Carron is also near to areas of multiple deprivation with chronic health records further reinforces the point.

Now that the small trail sections we have been permitted to build at Carron Valley have been up and running for nearly a year, CVDG arguments have been vindicated. The electronic trail counters prove that the public are attending in large numbers (at least relative to the size of the modest development) and we have hundreds of feedback forms which demonstrate phenomenal support for the project and indicate a very significant influx of newcomers to the sport.

CVDG understand that FCS must go through a period of consolidation regarding MTB development. Notwithstanding this, and for the reasons outlined above, there now appears to be acknowledgement that Carron Valley should be treated as a "special case." On the assumption this project is given the green light by FES, the Carron Valley Partnership now have the not insignificant task of raising the funding necessary to deliver the project. You indicated that it was hoped there would be discussions at Ministerial level and I wish to enquire if the Minister has now managed to meet with the Forestry Minister and to also ask what avenues are open to the Carron Valley Partnership to discuss the backing of this project by your Department.

Thank you again for your support. I would be indebted if you could also appraise the Minister of these recent developments and I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

Niall R Thomson
Chairman
CVDG