

## **Address to Hardingstone Parish Council – Introduction**

Good evening Councillors, my name is Tony Skirrow and as a committed mountain biker I took the initiative almost three years ago to take advantage of the British Cycling Places to Ride Fund and try to develop a mountain bike facility in Northampton. With Jonathan's help I was able to gather sufficient momentum to submit the Stage one application to British Cycling and gain acceptance to move on to stage two. This required the support of Northamptonshire Sport, the Golf Club and of course the Council, and some hard work, but we were successful in being awarded the funding from British Cycling in March this year.

There are many young people from diverse backgrounds inspired to ride in Northamptonshire. They are frustrated by the lack of facilities and sometimes take matters into their own hands, only to experience the disappointment of those tracks and trails being demolished. With somewhere "official" to call their own, they will be further inspired to progress and improve, whilst inspiring others to follow their lead.

The Northamptonshire area is devoid of any purpose built free to use cycling facilities, for off road cycling disciplines. Some unofficial trails spring up in local woods and are well used by local mountain bike riders, but obvious conflicts exist between the riders, landowners and other amenity users. A designated area for the growing number of off-road riders is long overdue in Northamptonshire.

We believe that with this facility Northampton can offer inclusive off-road biking for all ages and abilities; offering a start for those with an initial interest, and inspiration to those looking to progress to the highest level.

This project will provide a designated off road cycling area enabling all ages and all levels to learn, progress and hone their skills. The land has the ideal topography to be converted into off road cycling trails. Providing the area as a free-to-all facility will open mountain biking to a wider audience. Its location, less than 2km from Northampton town centre is ideal. There are traffic free cycle routes connecting the site with public transport hubs as well as major housing areas.

As well as rider to rider mentoring, this facility will be managed for use by community project for day activities, such as wellness programmes, skills coaching, mentorship, or just riding. Coaching staff will be engaged to provide services for minority groups. Volunteer wildlife groups will be encouraged to help maintain and develop the landscape between the trails as a natural habitat. Having other user groups involved will add to the diversity of the park, whilst introducing non-cyclists to the mountain bike environment.

The lasting legacy of this project will be one of community, a mountain bike community where riders inspire each other to improve and progress to the best of their ability regardless of background. A community that looks out for each other and the facility that brings them together.

This community will be encouraged to get involved with the running of the facility. Volunteer dig days will be organised to help maintain the trails and give local riders a sense of ownership. Experience from similar projects shows that this helps with day to day repairs and acts as a measure against misuse.

I'll pass you over to Sally now, who will go into the more technical aspects of the plan.