



Site Operation Plan

July 2026

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this document provides the framework for the detailed operations plan of the Pitfichie Downhill facility by the Gravitare North East charity and its partners.

Overview

Under the terms of Gravitare North East's lease with Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS). The facility is completely contained within an area of forest that will continue to be managed by FLS. Gravitare North East is obliged to manage the forest areas in accordance with the agreed Land Management Plan and safety protocols as may be required by the FLS (e.g. in relation to the use of chainsaws and machinery) and to not do anything that may be prejudicial to the FLS's ongoing UKWAS certification of the site.

Gravitare North East is responsible for the "operation of a mountain bike facility comprising mountain bike trails, car park, shelter and toilets, together with a nonexclusive ancillary right to use the access routes for access to the site and a mountain bike uplift".

Gravitare North East's permitted use includes the following

- to operate the facility within the permitted use of the lease
- rights to light vehicular access along access routes
- forest management within the lease area
- the promotion and hosting of MTB events.
- to decommission, remove and reinstate the facility.

Gravitare North East is obliged to

- Not to unreasonably interfere with, or cause disturbance or nuisance to the FLS's activities. Subject to receiving not less than six weeks written prior notice of its intended activities, to put in place reasonable and proportionate measures (including where appropriate the temporary closure of MTB trails or the wider facility) as may be required to enable those activities to be carried out safely and in accordance with all relevant regulation and best practice.
- To take all necessary and reasonable precautions to protect the nearby private water supplies from damage.
- Comply with all relevant legislation, including Construction Design Management Regulations and all relevant safety and good practice guidance, standards and regulation
- Inspect, risk assess and maintain the trails and car park (and all associated infrastructure) in accordance with legislation and best practice guidance.
- To use competent contractors and ensure any volunteers are properly trained and supervised, ensuring all trails are planned, designed and constructed in accordance with industry guidance and best practice.
- Work collaboratively with the FLS to facilitate their felling programme and effectively integrate the proposed bike facility into the Land Management Plan.

The operations plan will also meet Gravitare North East's obligations as a land holder under the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, namely

- Respect access rights in managing the lease.
- Act reasonably when asking people to avoid land management operations.
- Manage Hazards with care for people's safety.
- Work with local authorities and other bodies to help integrate access and land management.
- Take account of access rights for contiguous land.

Organisation

The Gravitare North East Trustees are responsible for execution of the operations plan.

The trustees will be supported by the following roles

Operations - Provision and day-to-day management of facilities, control of the uplift service, welfare induction and management of volunteers.

Forestry and Maintenance - Inspect and maintain all bike trails and adjacent forest areas, liaise with FLS on forest restrictions and the wider land Management Plan. Coordinate with Aberdeenshire Trail Association and contractors for execution.

Vehicle Management and HSE – Maintenance of the vehicle fleet and compliance with the Land Management Plan, CDM, UKWAS and other UK regulations.

Sport and Event Development – Manage a calendar of events, ensure their compliance with Gravitare North East and FLS event standards, promote participation and performance in mountain biking with riders, clubs and coaches.

Biodiversity Development – Development and execution of the Biodiversity plan through collaboration with FLS, environmental interest groups and volunteers.

These will be delivered with support from volunteers, contractors and professional advisors.

Site Operation Plans

Gravitare North East intends to operate the site so that it is safe, serviceable and presentable for routine use, allowing for uplift activity, and hosting of events and meeting its responsibilities and obligations. This is achieved by executing annual, seasonal and monthly plans for the following areas:

- Facilities - toilets, bins, cleanliness, signage and parking
- Forestry and trails – made surfaces, tracks and trails, forestry and tools
- Uplift and Vehicles
- Sport Activities and Events
- Biodiversity

Facilities - toilets, bins, cleanliness, signage and parking

Annual and Seasonal Actions

- Facilities are inspected and maintained (e.g. repainting) seasonally
- Toilets are emptied seasonally, or as required
- Location of bins and signage is reviewed seasonally and updated
- Register of trained volunteers is maintained seasonally and prior to work being executed
- Consultation with local user groups and community council is undertaken seasonally
- Meet Forestry and Land Scotland annually to make a plan for access road maintenance

Monthly Plans and Day to Day Actions

- Toilets are cleaned and restocked daily
- Bins are checked and emptied daily
- Overnight parking is monitored daily and discouraged (including signage)
- Monitor payment for uplift service daily (when running)
- Car park area is swept for litter weekly
- Check car park payment machines are empty
- Compliance with parking fees is checked monthly for monitoring
- Review of offsite informal parking is reviewed monthly, or as required

Forestry and trails

Annual and Seasonal Actions

- Monitor and plan any trail restoration works seasonally
- Define and provide training required for volunteers seasonally
- Car Park and Access Roads and other built surfaces are inspected and maintained seasonally or after significant weather events
- Contract with service providers, including Aberdeenshire Trail Association, for trail maintenance annually
- Recruit, train and retain trail maintenance volunteers annually in support of the Aberdeenshire Trail Association.
- Refresh the incident management and rider casualty evacuation plan with emergency services annually
- Co-develop an annual forest plan with Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) annually

Monthly Plans and Day to Day Actions

- monitor of ditches, grips, culverts, outfalls and areas prone to standing water [\[assets.pub...ice.gov.uk\]](#)
- Daily trail inspection – including feedback from riders
- Minor trail maintenance weekly e.g. clear drainage, sweep gravelly areas
- Remove overgrowth from track margins, and sites access, to maintain lines of sight down the track monthly
- Maintain and renew any tools that are used on site monthly
- Effect trail closures as required

Uplift and Vehicles

Annual and Seasonal Actions

- Maintain vehicles on site to the DVSA standards
- Monitor visitor and rider numbers annually
- Ensure vehicles are MOT, Insured and taxed annually
- Manage contracts with apply maintenance services providers
- Recruit and train drivers

Monthly Plans and Day to Day Actions

- Manage driver rota and driver welfare
- Undertake vehicle and trailer checks (daily walkaround to longer period checks)
- Maintain records of checks and maintenance
- Ensure compliance with speed (15mph) and manoeuvring protocols
- Inspect auxiliary equipment e.g. ties, seat covers and refresh as required

Sport Activities and Events

Annual and Seasonal Actions

- Manage a calendar of events (mountain biking or other groups) ensuring that they meet the sports governing body standards
- Announce the timing and nature of the events publicly, annually and seasonally
- Liaise with FLS, the community council and Aberdeenshire Council as required for holding of events
- Liaise the event organisers, clubs, coaches, funders and other bodies to prompt participation in mountain biking

Monthly Plans and Day to Day Actions

- Monitor the success of events
- Act on feedback from riders, residents and other stakeholders

Biodiversity

Gravitate North East will protect species and enhance biodiversity on Pitfichie Hill by following Scottish Forest Guidance Note 31: Forest operations and wildlife protection: November 2006 and Guidance Note 32: Forest operations and birds in Scottish forests: November 2006.

Annual and Seasonal Actions

- Define the species reporting process as required, complete reporting seasonally
- Maintain, confidentially, a map of all species particularly protected species
- Define measures for disturbance-free working areas and working periods
- Develop and maintain a network of interest groups to refresh the biodiversity plan
- Manage a calendar of events to execute the biodiversity plan, educate visitors and research species on site

Monthly and day to day plans

- Oversee work parties to ensure relevant qualifications and standards
- Encourage reporting of sightings

Operating Conditions

Site Opening and Closure

In accordance with the Scottish Outdoor Access guidance, the site, including the car park and trails, is open to all users all year round. The toilets can be locked by the operator.

The uplift will be closed and vehicles removed from site after each day of use. Closure of the uplift includes locking gates on the access road at the exit of the car park, and at the bottom of the existing downhill track (the existing FLS gate).

Closure and Restrictions

Trustees will decide if conditions render the site unsuitable for safe or sustainable use. Either the affected section of the trails or the whole site will be closed (as above). Signage will be available to indicate the site is closed, the closure will be advertised on social media, and access gates to the site will be closed (as described above).

Security

CCTV will operate in the car park area in order to monitor the condition of the car park and facilities remotely. Signs will announce the use of CCTV. Operations will comply with the Data Use and Access Act 2025, the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA)

Large Vehicles and Trailers

Larger vehicles such as vans and trailers will have access to the car park, for provision of horse boxes or larger vans for adaptive biking. Gravitate North East will ask that these users contact them and a space is designated for these users ahead of their arrival. Preferred areas for larger vehicle parking will be signposted in the car park.

Camping and Overnight Use

In accordance with the Scottish Outdoor Access guidance, camping can form part of responsible access provided campers observe responsible behaviour, environmental care, it is small-scale use and there is no damage or nuisance. As a result, the operations plan must be practical and proportionate.

Therefore:

- routine camping is not promoted on site
- signage will request that there is no overnight camping
- daily inspections will advise campers to camp on formal sites elsewhere

Uplift Operations and Shared Roads

The uplift vehicles will share the forest road with other forest users.

Uplift vehicles' speed will be limited to 15mph.

On approaching another forest user (walkers, horse riders or riders) the uplift vehicles must slow to a stop 20m away from the user, and either wait for the user to pass, or if approaching from behind, wait for the user to take up a safe position off the forest road before passing.

Overflow Parking

Overflow parking areas shall be brought into use during periods of high-demand. The framework for this element of the operational plan is as follows:

- An annual forecast of visitors numbers will be maintained. e.g. anticipating high usage on summer school holidays
- An overflow parking area will be identified and agreed with local landowners for high usage periods

Access to the overflow car parking, and from there to the site will be controlled by appropriate signage and stewards.

Events

The Events Operation Plan is designed to protect participants, spectators, staff, and the environment while safeguarding the interests of Gravitate North East (GNE) as site operator and Forestry Land Scotland (FLS) as the site owner.

Context

Gravitate North East expects the site to host up to five events a year of between 100 and 250 participants. Events will normally last two days, on a weekend, with preparation of the site up to 3 days before.

Event Operation Standards

Events will follow the guidance of the [National Access Forum Outdoor Events Guidance](#).

The plan applies to all events held at the Pitfichie Hill Site including the access, car park and all trails on the Pitfichie Hill.

Gravitate North East's Events Operation Plan will mirror the current Forestry and Land Scotland events process.

The classification of events is that used by Gravitate North East and Forestry and Land Scotland as follows:

Event type	Small event	Medium event	Large event
Walking/running*	25-50 participants	50-200 participants	200+ participants
Cycling**	25-50 participants	50-100 participants	100+ participants
Equestrian	10-25 participants	25-50 participants	50+ participants

Event type	Small event	Medium event	Large event
Planning lead time (minimum)	3-6 months	6-12 months	1-2 years

** includes orienteering, canicross and similar.*

*** includes triathlon, adventure racing, sled dog racing and similar.*

In general, group outings by club members are not classed as events. Although all groups should contact Gravitare North East to confirm the planning process.

Where applicable events will follow the guidance of the sport's governing bodies.

Events Planning Process

Those seeking to hold an event will complete an [events enquiry form \(Word\)](#) and send it to Gravitare North East to start the events operation plan application process. Gravitare North East and the event organiser will agree on a standard event agreement at the conclusion of the process.

Gravitare North East and the event organisers must agree the following in good time before the event, preferably a year ahead of the event (see above).

The during the process Gravitare North East and the event organiser will agree the following

Overall Event Management Plan

- Intended routes including start & finish points
- Events village/trade pitches
- Traffic/car parking management
- Vehicle uplift and/or access requirements
- Traffic Routing Signs and Sites, Signage marking diversions
- Spectator Management
- Evacuation Procedure
- Camping provisions
- Marshalling points and communications
- Waste management, including toilet requirements
- Health & Safety, Medical provisions
- Insurance Requirements
- Promotions & notification (inc filming, photography, media)
- Reinstatement Schedule (heavily/less heavily used areas)
- Any Section 11 Closure Orders and other notices

If camping, event control and concessions tents, and a tannoy system are required then event organisers, with Gravitare North East, must apply to Aberdeenshire Council for a Public Entertainment Licence at least 8 weeks prior to the event.

Contact and Information

Gravitare North East will assign a contact for enquiries, feedback and escalation of incidents on the site. The contact details will be displayed at the site, available to local residents, visitors and authorities through a website and social media.