

Commentary on the Financial Spreadsheet

Pitfichie Downhill



Executive Summary

Gravitate North East (GNE) proposes to formalise and improve biking existing activities on Pitfichie Hill, creating a facility called Pitfichie Downhill. Pitfichie Hill is already a recognised mountain biking destination, featuring both natural and purpose-built trails developed by FLS and the Aberdeenshire Trail Association. The site includes a nationally recognised downhill track that has hosted Scottish Championship-level racing.

Despite its popularity, the site currently lacks formal infrastructure, facilities, and management. This deficit has resulted in challenges including informal parking, unsanctioned trail building, environmental concerns, littering, and conflicts between user groups.

The proposed development will formalise mountain bike operations and user access through structured provisions. The organization will install dedicated car parking facilities, a rider paddock and event space, and two new trails. It will also provide uplift vehicle services for riders. Furthermore, all visitors will have access to toilets, and benefit from site services including maintenance, litter bins and event operations. The project will also include an environmental and biodiversity management programme. With the addition of formal car parking and trails, within the existing Forest Management Plan, this project will deliver community participation, sporting excellence, environmental stewardship, and rural economic growth.

1. Overview

Organisation

Gravitate North East (GNE) is an Aberdeenshire-based charity established in 2015 to develop mountain biking infrastructure and opportunities across North East Scotland. Our members are active in the biking and local community including volunteering for the trail association, mountain biking clubs, races and environmental groups.

Vision

The vision is to create a sustainable, community-led mountain biking facility. This will enhance participation and develop sporting excellence. It will also protect the environment and contribute to the economic resilience of rural Aberdeenshire.

The Opportunity

Pitfichie Hill has become one of Scotland's most recognised gravity mountain biking venues, attracting riders from across the country. However, the site faces several immediate challenges. It currently lacks designated parking, toilet facilities, and welfare facilities. Visitor activity remains unmanaged, which leads to informal trail development and environmental concerns. The site also provides limited support for events and competitions, creating user conflicts between different forest users. The proposed development addresses these challenges by building and managing a car park, toilets and visitor activities.

2. Products and Services

Visitor and Site Services

The project will provide on-site car parking facilities, toilets and dedicated site management for visitors.

Mountain Bike Facilities

The project will provide an enhanced trail network. This development includes making improvements to the existing downhill race trail. The team will develop additional gravity-focused trails and implement professional trail inspection and maintenance programmes.

A vehicle-based uplift service will transport riders and bikes to trail start points. Visitors will benefit from a formal car park, a rider paddock area, and dedicated event infrastructure. The site will also feature clear signage and wayfinding markers.

Events and Training

The site will host annual events, such as the Scottish Downhill Association and Scottish Enduro Series events. The facility will support rider coaching programmes and skills development sessions by local providers. The centre will host volunteer development programmes for trail building, biodiversity work, land management experience and other types of user events.

3. Strategic Objectives

Objective 1: Increase Participation

The project actively supports the Scottish Mountain Biking Strategy through community participation programmes and youth rider development. The charity will build school partnerships, coaching opportunities, volunteer pathways, and support systems for underrepresented groups. Target beneficiaries include young people, and those in rural communities. The charity will work closely with Scottish Cycling, Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland (DMBinS), local clubs, and educational organisations.

Objective 2: Achieve Sporting Success

Pitfichie Hill will provide a high-quality gravity riding venue that supports rider progression from grassroots participation to elite competition. The onsite facilities will host national training camps, rider coaching programmes, and talent development pathways. This facility aligns with Scottish Cycling's ambition to create world-class rider development environments.

Objective 3: Drive Economic Growth and Tourism

The Scottish MTB Strategy identifies mountain biking as a major contributor to Scotland's tourism economy. Pitfichie Hill will attract domestic and international visitors while increasing overnight stays in Aberdeenshire. This traffic will support local hospitality businesses, generate visitor spending, and create new employment opportunities. The project is estimated to contribute approximately £250,000 annually to the regional economy. Strategic partners include VisitScotland, Visit Aberdeenshire, One North East, and North East Adventure Tourism (NEAT).

Objective 4: Increase Biodiversity Gravitate North East is developing a dedicated Biodiversity Plan that complements the Forestry and Land Scotland Land (FLS) Management Plan. This plan will focus specifically on the trail corridors and surrounding habitat. For Example, potential projects include the removal of invasive non-native species and habitat restoration within Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS). The charity will also construct ponds and wet areas to enhance reptile and invertebrate habitats. They will improve native woodland connectivity and establish species monitoring programmes. Expert advice and guidance will be sought from RSPB Scotland, the Scottish Wildlife Trust, NatureScot, and Butterfly Conservation Scotland.

The project aims to demonstrate how recreational infrastructure can enhance biodiversity within a commercial forestry environment.

4. Market Analysis

Demand

Demand for mountain biking continues to grow across Scotland, particularly within rural communities. Strong evidence of this demand includes consistently sold-out race events at Pitfichie Hill. The region is seeing growing participation among young riders and increased use by schools and outdoor education providers. Overall, there is strong local and national rider interest in the site.

Competitive Position

Pitfichie Hill offers an established reputation and functional race infrastructure. It occupies an accessible location within Aberdeenshire and features a unique gravity riding focus. The project also benefits from strong volunteer and rider community support.

5 Community Benefits

Social benefits include improved recreation opportunities, deeper youth engagement, volunteer development, and positive health outcomes.

Environmental benefits include better overall trail management, biodiversity improvements, and a reduction in unauthorised trail construction.

From an economic perspective, the centre will drive tourism growth, increase visitor spending, support local businesses, and boost event-related economic activity.

Finally, the community will benefit from formalised site management, improved facilities for all users, and reduced conflicts between different user groups

6. Risk Assessment and Mitigation

Visitor Numbers and Traffic

The site expects to welcome up to 20,000 visitors per year. Mitigation measures include a formal Road Transport Assessment and traffic monitoring. The project will add passing places where required and create event management plans. Traffic surveys undertaken during national race events indicate that the existing road infrastructure can accommodate these projected visitor volumes.

Biodiversity Impacts

Environmental mitigation measures will include a comprehensive Biodiversity Management Plan and regular environmental monitoring. The charity will execute habitat enhancement projects and implement sustainable trail designs.

Surface Water Management

Any risks to surface water and drinking water will be mitigated through careful site selection for the new car park. The team will map watercourses and springs while applying sustainable drainage principles. Contractors will use industry-standard trail construction methods to prevent erosion.

Multi-User Access

To ensure multi-user safety, the site will deploy clear signage. The organisation will build formal facilities to manage user interactions safely.

7. Operations and Management

Governance

The project and facility will be overseen by the Board of Trustees of Gravitate North East and Gravitate Members according to the Charity's constitution.

Operational Roles

Operations Management - will be responsible for day-to-day operations, visitor services, volunteer coordination, and uplift management.

Forestry and Trail Maintenance - will handle trail inspections, maintenance works, forestry liaison, and contractor management.

Vehicle and Health & Safety Management - will look after vehicle maintenance,

regulatory compliance, and health and safety systems.

Sport and Event Development - will manage event programming, competition delivery, and coaching and rider development.

Biodiversity Development will be responsible for the delivery of biodiversity projects, volunteer engagement, and environmental partnerships.

Professional support will be provided in legal services, accounting, marketing, planning, and forestry consultancy.

8. Financial Plan

Development Funding

In terms of development funding, the project has already secured £28,000 raised through fundraising, membership contributions, and donations.

Capital Funding

The estimated capital requirement for the project is £1.1 million. Funding sources include £500,000 from the Scottish Cycling Facilities Fund, support from Opportunity North East, and additional grant funding that are currently being pursued.

Operating Revenue

Overall

Income from the uplift and Car Park is forecast to be £150,000 pa after visitor numbers have stabilised in year 4. This is offset by costs of sales (£15,000 pa) and operating costs of £120,000. Resulting in a net profit of approximately £15,000 pa. The assumptions for the business plan are included in Appendix 1.

The operation is considered in two elements: Car Park Operations and Uplift Operations.

Car Park Operations

Car park operations are forecast to generate an annual income of £18,000 p.a.. We also forecast revenue from donations and event-related charges to a total of £25,000 p.a. Costs for car park operations are £17,800 p.a. Costs are reduced from the Uplift Cost case. Building costs are £1500, with reliance on the volunteer trail crew and reduced marketing £1,000. Total costs are £20,500 p.a. and forecast net profit before tax of £5000 p.a.

Uplift Service

The uplift service is projected to bring in a forecast annual income of £124,000. This income will be offset by further operating costs, above the Car Park only case, which include vehicle maintenance, fuel, staffing, insurance, marketing, and storage. Directly associated Uplift costs are a total of £90,000.

Lease Proposal

The lease proposal includes an annual lease payment consisting of a £3,000 fixed annual rent. Additionally, the proposal outlines an 8% profit share to Forestry and Land Scotland during the first three years of operation, during which the uplift service market value is being established. The estimated annual lease is approximately £21,000.

9. Implementation Timeline

Phase 1 – Planning and Consents (3-6 months)

During the initial phase, focus will be placed on finalizing the lease agreement and submitting the necessary planning applications. Additionally, teams will conduct environmental assessments and complete the detailed design work for the site. At this stage, the biodiversity projects baseline and programme will commence

Phase 2 – Construction (3-4 Months)

The second phase will mark the beginning of physical developments, starting with the car park and facility installation. Simultaneously, trail works will get underway.

Phase 3 – Operational Launch

The third phase will see the official opening of the facilities and the formal introduction of the uplift services.

Phase 4 – Growth and Evaluation

In the final phase, management will establish visitor monitoring and environmental monitoring systems to track ongoing impact. This period will also involve a comprehensive financial review and the expansion of community participation Programmes.

10. 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, Gravitate North East will successfully establish Pitfichie Hill as a flagship example of sustainable mountain biking development in Scotland.

Appendix 1

Table of Assumptions for Business Plan

INCOME

Uplift Assumptions

Capacity

Route length (each way)	3.2 km (6.4km return)
Vehicle Speed	16 km/hr (10mph)
Unloading Time	3 mins
Round trip Time	27 mins
"vans"	8 seater x 2
Frequency	4 vans an hour
Riders Per Hour	35.5
Potential Runs per 8 hours	35 runs
Weeks Opening	50 weeks
Days a week	4 (Thursday/Sunday)
Capacity per Year	10,100 riders

Losses

Bad Weather Weeks	5
Low occupancy Thursday	15%
Low Occupancy Friday	25%
Weekend Occupancy	85%

Annual Riders	4954
Overall Annual Occupancy	49%

Uplift Tickets Sales

Based on industry prices - £35 per ticket

Max capacity of 36 tickets a day

4 days a week, max 50 weeks a year

@ 50% occupancy per annum

Those on uplift do not pay for parking.

Car Park Income Assumptions

Based on visitor numbers from similar facilities and trail application data in Aberdeenshire, An annual average of 20,000 riders a year, starting at 30,000 then dropping down over 2 years.

Assume that on average car occupancy is just under 2 per car.

Assume a purchase price of £3.50/car

25% non-payers

Exclude the uplift ticket purchases.

COSTS

Uplift Costs

Diesel	£1.44/l
Drivers	2
Hourly rate	£14/hr
Employers Costs (misc.)	40% of Salary
MOT & TAX	£2000 p.a.
Vehicle Insurance	£3500 p.a
Vehicle Maintenance	£12,000 p.a.

Uplift Consumables £3000

Trail and Road Maintenance

Trail Contractor - Based on usage escalating 2% of construction costs.

Road Maintenance - £5000 annual allowance

Signage – Allowance for renewal of signage and for events

Site Maintenance

Local contractor allowances for Toilet cleaning and emptying, tools, storage and security.

Marketing and Administration

Annual allowance for website, marketing, accountancy and insurance.

Forestry and Land Scotland Rent

A minimum base rental fee of £3000 per annum.

A fee based on 8% of turnover from uplift (including £3000 based rental fee).

