Dear Ms Wright,

I am writing to ask you as Chief Executive of HIE to intervene at Cairngorm and stop all the current work progressing until proper measures have been put in place to protect the environment.

This week, work started at Cairngorm to remove the West Wall chairlift, work which I understand is funded by HIE.     I have been sent photos of the work in progress (one attached) which shows no measures are being taken to protect the fragile soils and vegetation.  In policy terms this threatens to undermine not only the whole history of efforts to protect the environment at Cairngorm (so having made such strenuous efforts to protect the land when the funicular was constructed when the time comes to replace it will anything go?)  but  the entire planning system:

\* last year in order to get planning permission to move the West Wall poma return wheel, Natural Retreats had to produce a Construction Method Statement which outlined how the environment would be protected, including use of matting etc to reduce the impact of vehicles as shown in this photograph (we will ignore the fact here that those conditions were disregarded)

\* more recently,  the documentation released under FOI about the proposals to develop the Ptarmigan restaurant also contains a suite of measures about what would be done to protect the fragile environment around the Ptarmigan while work was taking place, were the proposals to be agreed by the Planning Authority

Both these sites are located a stone's throw from the former West Wall chairlift where the current work is taking place and it is hard to see any difference in the need to protect the environment around any of these sites.   If you dispute this, I would be grateful if you could explain why.   However, assuming the need to protect the environment is similar, we are now in a position in planning terms where new developments on the mountain funded by HIE  require detailed measures to protect the environment (as happened with the construction of the funicular) but removal of old infrastructure can be undertaken by whatever method HIE and Natural Retreats choose, without any regard for the environment.    This makes a farce of the whole planning system.

I have copies of correspondence between the Head of Planning at the Cairngorms National Park Authority and the consultant HIE engaged to scope these works.  In this Gavin Miles quite clearly that while in planning terms there was no requirement for planning permission to remove these structures, the CNPA requested that a Construction Method Statement describing the methods to be used should be produced and consulted on with it as National Park Authority.  This was, I believe, precisely because the CNPA understood the need for consistency at Cairngorm, whatever the technical planning requirements.   I would be grateful therefore if you could confirm whether or not a Construction Method Statement was ever produced and if so provide this to me.   If it wasn't I would request you explain why HIE has allowed the works to go ahead without a Construction Method Statement.    I also note that last year the CNPA asked Natural Retreats to produce a "standards manual" to govern all work at Cairngorm - this is not a new thing, there was a very good manual in place 20 years ago - but as far as I am aware nothing has been produced, let alone consulted on with recreational and environmental organisations. Perhaps you would be also kind enough to let me know whether HIE as landowner agrees that all works at Cairngorm should meet high environmental standards and if so what you are doing to ensure a standards/operational manual is produced and then that the standards it contains are implemented?

The contractors undertaking the work at the West Wall chairlift are McGowan.    These are the same contractors who undertook the work to construct the Shieling Rope Tow last year and who, along with Natural Retreats, breached the planning conditions set by the CNPA for that development and which resulted in a controversial retrospective planning application being made to the Cairngorms National Park Authority.   It is difficult to understand, given this history, why HIE would have allowed McGowan to be awarded the contract to undertake further work at Cairngorm.  Perhaps you could be good enough to do so now and also explain to me what account HIE takes of past performance before any contracts are awarded, whether directly or through intermediaries like Natural Retreats and why McGowan has been allowed to do further work at Cairngorm?

I trust that I have provided sufficient evidence for you to intervene and halt the work at Cairngorm  immediately but would be happy to provide further evidence of the destruction which is now taking place on request. For the avoidance of doubt I am not against a clear-up at Cairngorm, which I have been calling for it for some time, but the way its being done which is doing as much harm as good.

I look forward to your response.

Yours Sincerely,

Nick