

HIE response to Parkswatchscotland on the destruction at Cairngorm – by Keith Bryers

Description

Keith Bryers, Head of Property and Infrastructure at Highlands and Island Enterprise, has responded to my post on why the destruction at Cairngorm happened <https://parkswatchscotland.co.uk/2016/06/23/destruction-cairngorm-happened/>. I welcome the fact Mr Bryers is prepared to explain HIE's position which is as follows:

"This project was funded by HIE as part of a package of works to enhance the skiing infrastructure following competitive tender which led to the award of a lease to Cairngorm Mountain Ltd (CML) in 2014. The works contracts for the Shieling ski-tow replacement were awarded and managed by the ski area operator, CML, who obtained Planning Permission in 2014.

As part of that planning approval to replace the Shieling ski-tow with a new tow, ground works were undertaken to remodel embankments created by the bulldozing of ski pistes in the 1960s. The work has created a ground profile more suited to the new tow and modern ski operations and, once reinstatement is complete, this will result in a more natural-looking profile and appearance.

Rather than simply seed the former lift track, which was used to move materials and components of the new tow, avoiding further disturbance due to continual tracking, a permanent maintenance route is being formalised on the same alignment. This was kept within the 30m x 300m agreed work site of the 2014 planning approval. It makes operational sense that CML wish to retain this track as it will allow routine maintenance to the new tow and others nearby. It will also allow movement of snow cannons to take place without having to drive across vegetation in these areas and will minimise ground disturbance to the surrounding ski pistes in the future. The access track verges are currently being revegetated, reducing the width, installing cross drains and creating a central vegetated strip.

Approval has previously been obtained by CML from SEPA to create bridged culverts at the Allt a'Choire Chais watercourse adjacent to the base of the ski-tow. This is part of on-going environmental improvement works and, when completed, combined with the new ski-tow, will increase safety, drainage, and provide better contours for skiers as a replacement for the previous timber bridge crossings.

The area of embankment that was re-profiled is along the Lower Loop path/ track which also originated in the 1960s to create a track and ski piste. This area is used as the primary descent route for skiers to Base level. Late in the process of installing the new lift it became apparent that the area around the base of the lift needed to be raised and the material from the bank was used to create the required ground levels. This has provided a wider, safer piste whilst removing the snow-making earthworks and steel pipes from the 1960s. CNPA have advised CML that a retrospective planning application is required to document the levels and ground works associated with the regrading of part of the bank along the Lower Loop Path and this application has been submitted by CML .

The project remains a 'work-in-progress' and is not complete; CML and their contractors are well experienced in ground restoration work. This experience is being applied to this project and adjacent areas of ground disturbed during underground cable renewal and ski-tow remediation works. Restoration at this altitude and with the prevailing ground conditions takes at least 2 to 3 years to have full effect but we believe the success of the restoration works undertaken during the funicular project demonstrates it will be successful.

The Lease provides that CML are responsible for maintenance, including that of the ground. HIE is satisfied that the measures currently being taken by CML will address the issues raised in your article."

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. HIE
3. natural retreats
4. planning

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