

The destruction at Cairngorm by Natural Retreats continues

Description



The trench that has been dug along the entire length of the car park T bar to install new cabling – photo credit George Paton

I was delighted that the [coverage](#) by parkswatchscotland of the destruction at Cairngorm was picked up by Rob Edwards in the [Sunday Herald](#) and on his [website two weeks ago](#). The articles are significant because they include confirmation from a senior member of staff within the Cairngorms National Park Authority that the work undertaken by Natural Retreats on the Shielling ski tow breached planning permission. After six months of efforts by local activists at last the CNPA appear to be accepting there is an issue.

Whether Highlands and Islands Enterprise accept there is an issue is far less clear as this email to me from HIE illustrates:

“Thank you for your e-mail of 23rd June 2016 received below asking for ‘copies of all the written information you hold about the Planning Application for the replacement Shieling ski tow (DET 2014_0251) including correspondence with Natural Retreats about how they managed the works and any communications HIE had with the contractors about these works’.

I can confirm that HIE holds no information about the actual Planning Application for the replacement Shieling ski tow (DET 2014-0251) we also hold no direct correspondence with Natural Retreats about how they managed the works.”

HIE, as landlord with ultimate responsibility for the good custodianship of the area, need to explain why they hold NO information about the unlawful works conducted by Natural Retreats at Cairngorm? The absence of any information or records suggests that HIE has expressed no concern and taken no action about the damage caused by its tenant at Cairngorm although it was first alerted to this nine months ago. It also raises questions about how Keith Bryers in his [post](#) on parkswatchscotland was able to claim the new track that was constructed without planning permission was justified for maintenance purposes and to move snow cannon. This claim now appears not to have been based on any written information. A good reason for the CNPA to reject any retrospective planning application for the unlawful track.

One might have thought that having been subject to such adverse national media publicity Natural Retreats would have been more careful about what they were doing at Cairngorm or that HIE would have warned them that standards needed to improve. Unfortunately the photos in this post illustrate

that nothing has changed.



Photo credit George Paton

Natural Retreats has dug the trench along the entire length of the Carpark T-Bar without any ground protection measures being in place. All of the spoil materials have been dumped onto the surrounding vegetation and nothing was done to try to protect that ground from the tracked vehicle used for the excavations to install new cabling.

Given their recent history, you'd have thought that Natural Retreats would have contacted the CNPA Planning department beforehand but parkswatchscotland has seen an email that shows the CNPA was unaware of these works.

CNPA has now confirmed that planning permission was not required because the replacement cabling is not classed as a new development. If this is true – and I suspect it is – it makes a mockery of how

our planning laws are protecting our most fragile areas. On the one hand, during the funicular construction, stringent measures were required to limit damage to soils and vegetation. On the other hand, the operator of Cairngorm Mountain is now free to adopt whatever practice they see fit to replace the cabling on the car park ski tow which runs parallel to the lower part of the very same funicular and over similar ground. While this illustrates that our planning laws are hopelessly inadequate in the protection they offer our mountains, our National Parks really should be able to find a way to stop damage like this happening.



Although the Car Park ski tow runs parallel to funicular very different standards have been applied

Photo credit Alan Bratney

The solution is not difficult: HIE simply needs to require its tenant to adopt best practice as recommended by CNPA for all ground works and the management of its land at Cairngorm. Unfortunately it looks like Natural Retrreats are only too aware that neither the CNPA nor HIE are

going to stand up to them and are operating accordingly (taking the cheapest route possible).



More evidence of the lack of care by Natural Retreats

Photo credit Alan Bratney

Category

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