

The story behind what's going on at Badaguish by Phil Swainson

Description



Badaguish from Meall a Buachaille ridge showing the huge increase in area covered by the development

In response to an editorial about the repeated breaches of planning requirements at Badaguish by Speyside Trust ([see here](#)), I had a letter published in the Strathspey and Badenoch Herald last week explaining what I think has been going on. I hope to cover this further in the next few weeks but meantime appended are some more photos illustrating why this matters from an environmental perspective.

The 'real' deal is ...

YOUR editorial of August 25th highlighted the inadequacy of the Cairngorms National Park Authority's planning officials in not asking for sight of the much vaunted "Masterplan" for the development of the Badaguish site.

As I have pointed out before, no such document exists. That there is no such proper long term plan for a development of this scale is shocking.

Can I offer what I believe the masterplan has been for the last 12 years or so. When the Highland Council was awarded lottery funding for outdoor activity premises, the Speyside Trust Director and Board manoeuvred the Highland Council into moving onto the Badaguish site instead of the council developing its own premises. This was because they had "spare capacity" at Badaguish.

A large proportion of the lease of four lodges at Badaguish (over £400,000) was paid in advance (contrary to Highland Council Standing orders), and surprise surprise, this sum, and then the full amount of the lease payment started to appear in planning and other applications a match funding in a number of development projects.

The council was pronounced as a partner in these projects by the Speyside Trust, despite numerous protestations from senior council officials that it was most definitely not a partner.

One of the projects was to build four more lodges to replace the ones occupied by Highland Council. So much for the spare capacity.

Only a few weeks after taking

up post as the Highland Council's Manager at Badaguish in 2007, I was given an insight into the Speyside Trust's thinking.

Their director, Andrew Mackenzie, told me that it would be financially advantageous now for the trust to give the council notice to quit (a few months into a 25-year lease!).

I immediately informed my superiors, and they confronted him with this expression of bad faith. He only grudgingly admitted to saying this, and withdrew it. And of course this is what eventually happened.

By refusing to transfer the lease to the Highland Council's arm's length company, Highlife Highland, they made it impossible for the council to run its operation at Badaguish. The council quit in early 2015.

The Speyside Trust had to pay back about £500,000, as documented in your paper at the time. For that it took over four much improved lodges. Income from lets will soon pay off the debt.

The masterplan was successful. Use the council, its finance, and its good name to expand the business, then get rid of them. And no more affordable accommodation for Highland schools and other young people to experience the outdoors.

As you rightly point out, there are still other questions to be asked. For me these revolve around the nature of the business at Badaguish.

In my many years there I saw only a very small number of disabled people as guests of the Speyside Trust, whose raison d'être is a charity for the benefit of disabled people.

I have asked these questions publicly in the past.

Perhaps our new MSP Katie Forbes, who also wrote about Badaguish in the same issue, can ask some questions to established the true facts.

Phil Swainson
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Two of the lodges leased by Highland Council between 2006-15



The new camping pods are in a large area of what was plantation forest which has been felled – as yet no agreed lease with Forestry Commission Scotland for the use of this land



The lack of care is not dissimilar to Natural Retreats up the hill at Cairngorm

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