

The Cairngorm Glenmore Strategy and Natural Retreats

Description



The problem and the potential: signs of neglect and mismanagement with montane scrub behind

A week ago, on the same day that the consultation on the new Park Partnership Plan closed, the Cairngorms National Park Authority approved the Cairngorm Glenmore Strategy ([see here](#)). This had been subject to public consultation earlier this year.

All the detailed visitor management proposals which were in the consultation draft have been stripped out of the strategy and will be worked up into a Glenmore Visitor Improvement Plan and Cairngorm Masterplan. The final strategy is much shorter, simpler and easy to understand. A great plus compared to the morass of documents and plans that made up the draft Partnership Plan and it has avoided being completely dummed down too.

In my view there are two glaring omissions. The first is that Rothiemurchus Estate is not included, although its an integral part of Glenmore. I am afraid the presentation of the strategy as being about public authority owned land is simply an attempt by the CNPA to put a good spin on this. The fact is Rothiemurchus declined to join and the CNPA was powerless to make it do so despite the Scottish Government having agreed that Forestry Commission Scotland should acquire part of the estate for £7.4m last year. The sad fact is landowners in the National Park are a law unto themselves.

One could also say that too of the Speyside Trust who run Badaguish and who have consistently ignored planning requirements. The Strategy has nothing to say about Badaguish. Its not on the map of sites identified for visitor infrastructure development, unlike Glenmore Lodge, the Youth Hostel and campsite despite far more development going on at Badaguish. This omission is quite extraordinary and conspiracy theorists will note Badaguish is named on every other map in the Strategy document apart from the visitor infrastructure one! This undermines the credibility of the Strategy much as I hope the CNPA Board has now decided to take a firm stand and use its enforcement powers to prevent any further unlawful development on the site.

On the positive front, the Strategy contains a number of actions for the Cairngorm ski area which I believe most people who cares about the place would agree with:

- Safeguard the plateau habitats and species by actively managing recreation pressures
- Develop action plan to enhance the ski area by improving storage and removal of disused items
- Ensure enhancements within the ski area are implemented to high quality standards appropriate to the sensitive environment
- Develop agreed best practice standards for development and enhancement works in the ski area [actually good practice standards have existed since the early 1970s, they just need enforcing]
- Expand montane woodland establishment within and around the ski area
- Support enhancement of the wintersports experience and year round activity provision

I was particularly pleased to see the commitment to clean-up the ski area and expand montane woodland within it – suggestions which have been made several time on Parkswatch.

However, the problem is that the strategy bears no resemblance to what is actually going on on the hill at present. Natural Retreats simply ignore all planning requirements (further photos proving this will appear soon!) and Highland Council and the CNPA as planning authorities have so far failed to do anything.

What does ensuring “enhancements with the ski area are implement to high quality standards appropriate to the sensitive environment” mean when Highlands and Islands Enterprise, CNPA and Highland Council are not prepared to speak out, condemn Natural Retreats for their mis-management and intervene to stop this?



The destruction around the Coire Cas Gantry – Photo Credit Terry Smith 23 September 2016

So what are CNPA, Highland Council and HIE going to do to meet the management aspirations set out in the Strategy?

Management interventions will improve the natural environment, landscape and visitor experience and retain the sense of wildness and space found in the area.

How does letting Natural Retreats get away with the destruction they have caused ensure that “Cairngorm and Glenmore will be a high quality mountain and sports destination”?

How can our public authorities claim that “Cairngorm and Glenmore will be at the heart of collaboration with neighbours to protect the mountain plateau” when they are allowing Natural Retreats to destroy part of that very same plateau? ([see here](#))

The worst though is at the end of the Strategy where after saying that “Natural Retreats and partners to develop and deliver masterplan for Cairngorm Mountain” – a step forward – that “*Natural Retreats and Forest Enterprise Scotland will lead on delivering spatial plans that set out the detailed actions focused on improving facilities at Cairngorm Mountain and Glenmore respectively. These plans are expected to be completed in the next year.*” How Natural Retreats can be trusted to lead on anything is beyond my ken.

Now this is not all the fault of CNPA. HIE as landowner have primary responsibility for ensuring Natural Retreats as their leaseholder maintains the highest environmental standards and they have completely failed to do so. Its about time that CNPA repeated the call they made on 7th November 2006 for the ownership of the Cairngorm Estate to be transferred to Forestry Commission Scotland:

“The board of the CNPA considered its response to the consultation on the transfer of the estate from current owners Highland and Islands Enterprise (HIE) to FCS at its monthly board meeting on Friday 3 November.

David Green, Convener of the CNPA board said: “We fully support this transfer subject to the delivery of an inclusive approach to the estate’s management and the delivery of a wide range of public benefits.

“It seems sensible that Forestry Commission Scotland should assume ownership of the estate, rejoining it to its holding at Glenmore, and the organisation has a proven track record in managing land to deliver public benefits and ensuring that local and national interests are fully involved.”

Among the other points raised by the CNPA in its response to the consultation are:

- *An early priority should be the production of a management plan to steer the future of the estate and this should be done following consultation involving a wide range of interested parties. Such a plan should include ways of delivering the priorities emerging in the Cairngorms National Park Plan as well as incorporating integration with neighbouring land holdings.*
- *Short term environmental improvements, such as the removal of some ski-ing infrastructure, should not be carried out at this stage. Decisions on these proposals should be deferred and instead considered through a full management planning process and through consultation with all those interested in this aspect of the estate.*
- *Bureaucracy should be minimised and all meetings relating to the management of the estate should be open to the public.*

Fiona Newcombe, the CNPA’s Head of Rural Development Strategy commented: “Forestry Commission Scotland is the obvious organisation to take over the Cairngorm Estate. As an enabling organisation, the National Park Authority is not best placed to own land, but rather positively influence land management by others. We are fully supportive of this move and welcome the principle of wide stakeholder engagement in the management of the estate.

I think the CNPA were right in 2006. Until the Cairngorm Estate is transferred from HIE to FCS (and Natural Retreats replaced as operator of the ski area) the actions set out in the Cairngorm Glenmore Strategy will remain aspirations.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

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Author

nickkempe