

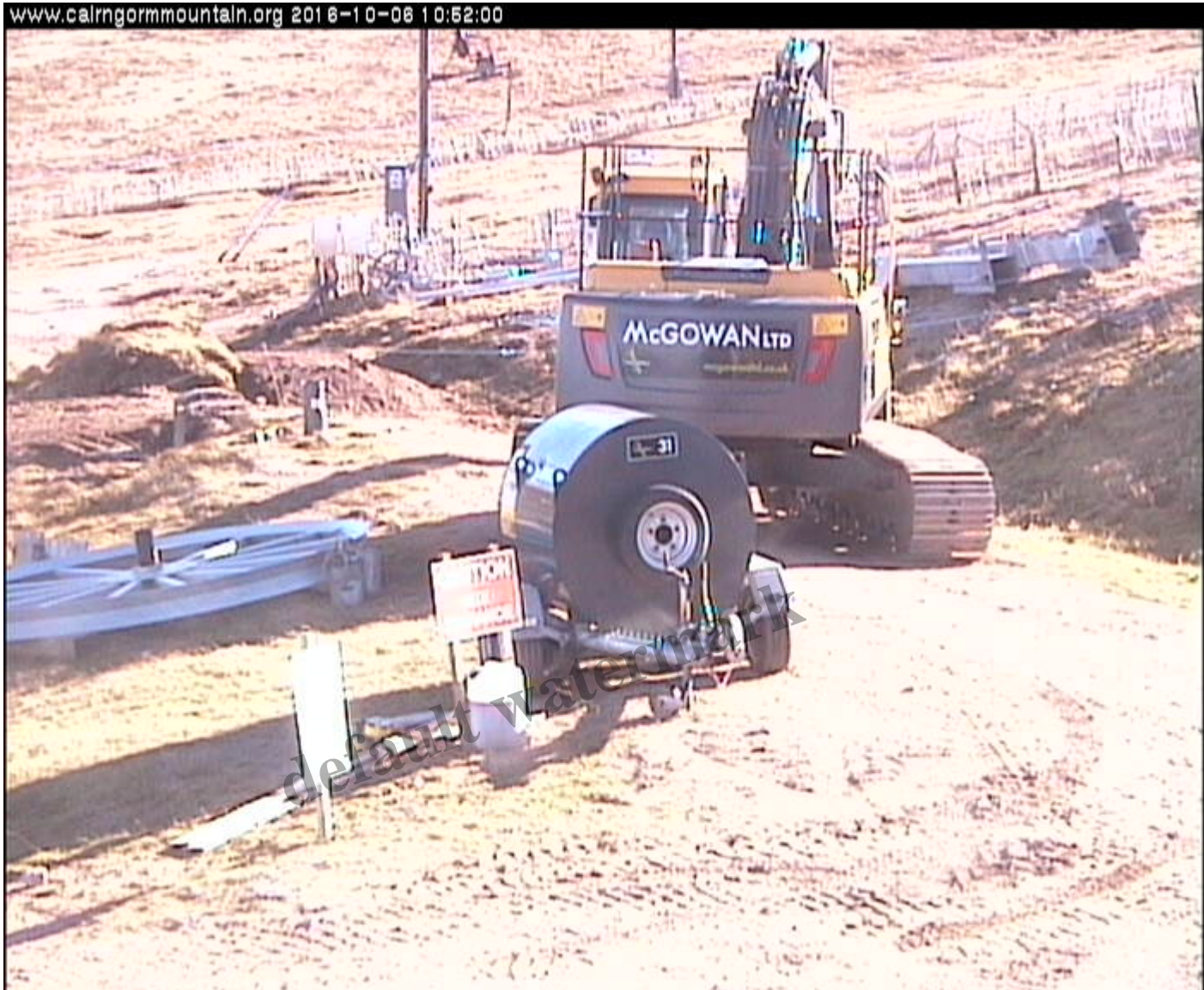
Empowering planning to deliver a great place at Cairngorm

Description



The new concrete plinth for the replacement West Wall poma return wheel can be seen just left of ce

Breaches of the planning permission granted by Highland Council to Natural Retreats to replace the West Wall poma return wheel and re-landscape the off-ramp have been continuing (see here)



Fuel bowser and plastic container on site

The Planning Method Statement required *“All fuelling and oils to be carried out in appropriate areas” and stated this would be “outside top station garage, where all fuelling and proper storage of fuel is to be kept”*. The point of this was to prevent an oil spill on the plateau. Natural Retreats and the contractors have ignored the requirement.



McGowan's vehicle parked on vegetation

Natural Retreats planning application claimed that “A site cordon for access will be established to control vehicle movement and prevent damage to vegetation” and required the “Contractor to park up any machinery on existing track”. Again, this is clearly not happening.

These and other breaches of planning permission have been reported to Highland Council, who have at least visited the site, but so far no other action has been taken. Both Highland Council and Cairngorms National Park Authority appear to be in a complete state of paralysis when it comes to using their enforcement powers.

“Empowering planning to deliver great places” is the title of the Scottish Government’s independent

review of the planning system published earlier this year. It's quite clear about the need for planning authorities to use their enforcement powers:

We acknowledge that there are concerns about planning authorities not taking enforcement action. Our understanding is that the legislation already allows for a wide range of action to be taken and that there are already options to respond quickly to a breach including fixed penalties and interim stop notices. We also propose that this work considers whether fixed penalties and fees for retrospective applications should be substantially increased to provide a more effective deterrent.
(paragraph 30)

Cairngorm is a great mountain, the Cairngorm ski area should be a great place and its time that CNPA and Highland Council recognised that Natural Retreats cannot be trusted to deliver that great place and they need to start exercising a far greater degree of control over what is happening there. If they want advice on this perhaps they should ring Petra Biberbach, who was on the three member panel that produced "Empowering Planning" and is Chair of the Planning Committee at the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority. I would hope she agrees that how Natural Retreats is operating is just the sort of thing that brings the planning system into disrepute.

Planning Authorities though also need to ensure the right specifications are agreed in the first place. The Ptarmigan area has been overrun with vehicles during the works on the West Wall poma. This presents a real contrast to the days when vehicle access to the hill was closely controlled and the access track to the top station was still called the "emergency access track".



Just how many vehicles are really required to do this work?

Photo Credit Terry Smith 10

Unfortunately Highland Council never thought to question just how many vehicles would be brought up the access track and why. Surely the contractor's staff could have accessed the construction site by the funicular reducing the erosion on the access track? The problem is that the planners simply do not have the expertise to know what should be required for works in sensitive environments and whereas previously there used to be a comprehensive estate management plan for Cairngorm ([cemp2-adopted-plan](#)) which involved all the agencies, there is now..... nothing. While primary responsibility for this lies with HIE, as the landowner, it is ironic that standards have collapsed during the lifetime of the National Park.

Its worth reading the vision from the last Cairngorm Estate Management Plan – its amazing that this

was not simply updated for the Glenmore Cairngorm Strategy:

Our vision sees the high hills returned to the most natural state possible, while continuing to provide a high quality educational, wild-land and recreational experience, including downhill skiing facilities at Cairn Gorm, Glenshee and the Lecht. These uses will be managed to ensure minimal damage, and allow clear trends towards ground recovery by natural processes to develop. We also foresee that local communities will continue to benefit from the visitors who are attracted by the hills.

The last Estate Management Plan also provided for “An annual tour of inspection of the Ski Area will take place in May to which SNH and other interested parties will be invited. Works requiring restoration will be reported to Cairngorm Mountain Limited and others, as appropriate, for action.” The planning authorities don’t need to re-invent the wheel, they simply need to say that they expect Natural Retreats to abide by former environmental standards and then enforce these.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

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

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