

Evidence of the lack of investment at Cairngorm

Description



The Coire Cas t-bar Gantry December 2016. HIE has paid £73,377 towards emergency works to stop the gantry collapsing but they have not been completed a year later. Why not? Photo Credit Alan Bratney

Ten days ago I raised question about how much Natural Retreats is actually investing at Cairngorm ([see here](#)). The question of who is responsible for investing what at Cairngorm is complicated and not easy to see from the lease between Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Natural Retreats (I am working on it). This [FOI response](#) does show what HIE spent between Natural Retreats taking over and August 2016 (a total of £750,275) but what is not in the public realm at present is planned future investment, either by HIE or by Natural Retreats. Whatever the exact division of responsibilities, the latest photos from Cairngorm show its not working.

The Coire Cas T-bar Gantry



December 2016 Photo Credit Alan Bratney

Emergency works were agreed to the Coire Cas T-Bar Gantry over a year ago to prevent its collapse before the ski season (a legacy of underinvestment). Highland Council agreed these could go ahead without planning permission because it was an emergency and the associated works on the track and embankment were described as “de minimis”. HIE paid £73,377 of public money to Natural Retreats as follows:

t/ ALL WORKS associated with the Cas Gantry, including Groundworks, Surveying, Tendering and Mechanical Installation.

Its not clear from this if the £73,377 just covered the works to the gantry, as illustrated in the photos above, or whether it also included the reprofiling of the bank and widening of the track to the south. What the photos show though is that none of the work has been completely properly or to the standard one should expect in a National Park.



The “restoration” of the embanking. The blue reseeding pellets have been spread too late in the year and are being washed away by rainfall. You can see how the slope has begun to erode and its not difficult to predict that by the end of the winter the erosion will be far worse.

What we don’t know is if the £73,377 was insufficient to complete the works or whether Natural Retreats has not completed all the works it was supposed to do. Either way, HIE should have taken action months ago to ensure the works were completed properly. What the failures at the Cas Gantry also demonstrate is that the planning authorities, whether Highland Council for supposed minor works or the Cairngorms National Park Authority, should not be agreeing to such works going ahead without planning permission. It means they have deprived themselves of planning enforcement powers which could be used to force Natural Retreats/HIE to spend whatever is needed to complete this work properly. Both could still call though for HIE/Natural Retreats to repair the damage under the agreements they made in the Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy.

The West Wall poma

HIE paid a further £75,612 of public money to Natural Retreats for:

“u/ ALL WORKS associated with the proposed extention and fixed return bull-wheel installation, including all submitted contractors and supplier’s costs for total realization of this Project.



The West Wall poma extension, paid for by HIE was completed in October.

While the work from a distance appears better finished than the Cas Gantry, you can see the damage that has been created by the use of tracked vehicles in the foreground. Highland Council has still not responded to complaints about Natural Retreats’ failure to ensure their contractors adhered to the conditions set out in the Method Statement.

The new return wheel contrasts with the bottom of the West Wall poma which is falling to bits.



Loading ramp fencing in a dangerous condition



Loading ramp wood showing signs of rot



The control hut door does not close [tied together with twine but open enough to fill with snow in a storm.
All photos Alan Bratney

I am not clear whose responsibility this is, HIE who is responsible for paying for major works on the infrastructure, or Natural Retreats who are responsible for more day to day maintenance. The position as I understand it is further complicated because the lease refers to a schedule of delapidations which was to be agreed before the entry date but which is not yet, as far as I am aware, in the public realm.

While HIE had paid £12,626 to Natural Retreats by the end of August for “Replacement Lift Huts” this appears not to have covered the lify hut at the West Wall poma which is falling to bits:



West Wall poma lifties hut

Neither does it appear to have included the White Lady ski Hut which is in an even worse condition.



What does seem clear from the FOI and lease is that Natural Retreats are responsible for replacing the snow fencing at Cairngorm (which was generally in a terrible state). Back in August Natural Retreats said this about the progress on new fencing along the M2 and West Wall poma uptrack:

The weather has been fantastic this week on Cairngorm Mountain and the fencing team have been making amazing progress on the M2 and the West Wall Poma uptrack.Ops team.

Posted by [Cairngorm Mountain](#) on [Saturday, August 20, 2016](#)

The West Wall poma uptrack fencing has been worked on sporadically over the last two summers but is nowhere close to completion and obviously needs doing. Did HIE set Natural Retreats any deadline for the completion of these works?



West Wall uptrack snow fencing December 2016 Photo credit Alan Bratney

Other Fencing

In fact Natural Retreats has now been working on replacement fencing across Cairngorm for over two years and its far from complete.



Incomplete new snow fencing shieling rope tow December 2016 Photo Credit Alan Bratney

What needs to happen

Given the evidence of the photos above, I believe it would be in the public interest for HIE and Natural Retreats to answer publicly, whether they can evidence:

- a) each are investing sufficient monies at Cairngorm, in their own areas of responsibility, to prevent further deterioration of the ski infrastructure, and
- b) the cuts in staffing which were evident in Cairngorm Mountain Ltd's accounts the first year Natural Retreats took over, has had an impact on the progress that has been made in replacing fencing at Cairngorm and other aspects of maintenance of the ski infrastructure for which they are responsible.

Its time too the Cairngorms National Park Authority started to ask for answers to the same questions and to make it clear to HIE and Natural Retreats that it expects the highest possible standards at Cairngorm and will do everything in its power to see this happens.

Category

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