

HIE's reckless procurement process at Cairngorm

**Description**

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Highlands and Islands Enterprise appointed McGowan, an Aviemore contractor, to undertake the "clear-up" that is currently being undertaken at Cairngorm. This has involved removal of potentially re-usable lift infrastructure from Coire na Ciste and has ignored environmental standards ([see here](#)). HIE have now provided, as a result of FOI requests, information [ITT Report "Redacted"](#) about HOW McGowan was appointed. However, as yet they have provided no further information about the specification of the works, which would have shown what standards should have been applied. What the latest information shows is the McGowan were appointed purely on price, with no regard for quality.

This contravenes the Scottish Government's statutory guidance and procurement reform programme which has, over the last few years, introduced numerous measures to ensure all tenders for works or services funded by the public purse take wider environmental, social and economic factors into account. HIE appears however is a law unto itself and the consequences have been quite predictable:

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The concrete remains of tower bases and plinth lifts removed from Coire na Ciste.

HIE's consultant, an ex-Natural Retreats employer, told the Cairngorms National Park Authority that the lift infrastructure in Coire na Ciste would be removed by helicopter. Instead, McGowan has removed them by truck ([see here](#)). The result is:

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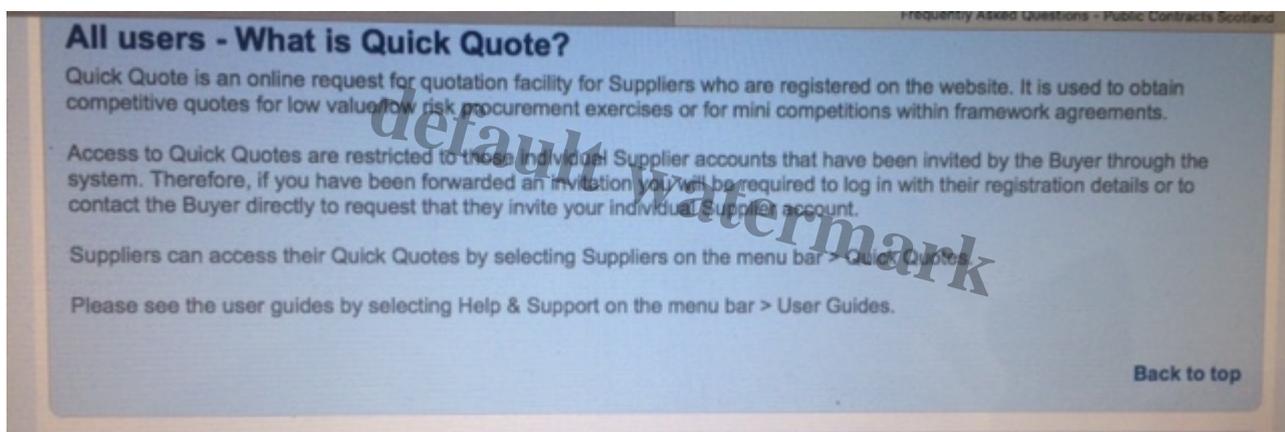
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Damage to ground vegetation in Coire na Ciste caused by trucks used to remove lift infrastructure

Our public authorities need to explain how this is acceptable when, during the construction of the funicular just round the hill, they required contracts to restore every stone the right way up and practically protect every blade of grass? All the historical standards that have ever been agreed for Cairngorm are now just being ignored and the way contracts are being tendered and awarded at Cairngorm is one of the main mechanisms behind this race to the bottom. The mountain, and the people who visit it, deserve far far more.

## The tender process and award

Rather than taking direct responsibility for the tender process, HIE appointed Torrance Limited Liability Partnership to carry out the process for them by means of the quick quote system:



The Quick Quote system is supposed to be used only for "low risk" procurement exercises. Given all the things that had gone wrong with the works in Coire Cas last year, with needless destruction of soils and vegetation ([see here for example](#)) and the wilful disregard of planning requirements ([see here](#)), it's pretty clear that the risks associated with works at Cairngorm are not low and that this process was not appropriate. The explanation for its use may be that HIE was very aware of the Save the Ciste Group's proposals to re-instate skiing in Coire na Ciste and the Quick Quote process allowed it to get rid of the re-usable elements of the lift infrastructure as quickly as possible.



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Many of the former lift towers were in acceptable condition, it was their concrete bases which had er

The report on the tender shows that HIE did not ask Torrance LLP to consider the quality of the bids received:

## **6.0 VERIFICATION OF THE TENDERS - QUALITY SECTION**

### **6.1 Information provided within this Section.**

Although, not part of the evaluation criteria, all Contractors were encouraged to provide appropriate information on their Relevant Experience & Technical Capability in order that HIE / Cairngorm Mountain could satisfy themselves as to the suitability of each Contractor should they be asked to undertake this project.

The information provided by McGowan Ltd including Proposed Delivery Team, Relevant Experience, Service

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Delivery Methodology & Programme was sent to HIE & Cairngorm Mountain for their review & comments. All information provided was found to be in order and compliant with the Employers Requirements Etc as set out in the tender documentation.

## **7.0 QUALITY / PRICE SCORING**

### **7.1 ITT Evaluation Criteria**

Tenders were considered on a Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT) basis using a 0% / 100% (Quality/Price) weighting. See abstract taken from the ITT documentation.

While the 0% for quality speaks for itself, contractors were "encouraged" to provide information about their relevant experience. However, they were NOT "required" to do so. The obvious question is whether McGowan, in their bid, explained that they were the contractor who had ignored the planning conditions set by the Cairngorms National Park Authority for the new Shieling rope tow? If they hadn't, HIE knew all about the record of McGowan at Cairngorm and the report makes clear they were asked for comment. HIE found the information "to be in order and compliant" which indicates they have manipulated the process to prevent consideration of past quality issues.

## **9.0 BUDGET COST COMPARISON**

The Budget Cost for this project was thought to be in excess of £200,000 based upon the previous quotations received by Cairngorm Mountain for a lesser scope of works in late 2016. The submission from McGowan Ltd at approx £230K compares favourably given the nature of the works & location etc.

Note how the price compared favourably with works undertaken by McGowan at Coire Cas that had helped destroy the reputation of Natural Retreats and brought the National Park into disrepute. Despite this HIE decided it was acceptable to agree to more of the same.

The ostensible explanation for this is the bids from other contractors (their names and the amounts of their bids were redacted by HIE) were apparently considerably higher:

The difference in tendered costs for the proposed works indicates [redacted] has worked here on various previous contracts and has formed a good relationship with the site at that time. This has allowed the Contractor to have gained an advantage through their closeness to the site, their known & skilled local workforce together

with their local knowledge from working on the mountain.

Given the large difference in costs between the first company & the **only the McGowan Ltd tender submission would be considered** [redacted] **happy with the information provided within the Quality Section** [redacted] been based.

I suspect that if the other contractors bids had built in quality and they knew about this they would have had every justification to appeal the decision under procurement law.

The statement that McGowan has a good working relationship with Natural Retreats and Cairngorm tells you is all three organisations are in this together when it comes to undermining the Cairngorms National Park and standards at Cairngorm. HIE has every chance to learn from what has gone wrong in the past and its clear that it does not want to do so. This is post-truth procurement and part of a post-truth approach to the management of Cairngorm which, like the neo-liberals, claims all is going well and there is no alternative when the evidence tells you the opposite.

Fortunately, an alternative is now getting off the ground:

# 'Overwhelming response' after buyout plan is aired by group

By GAVIN MUSGROVE

AVIEMORE and Glenmore Community Trust chiefs have said they are overwhelmed by the many messages of support received since going public with plans for a community buy-out of the Cairngorm Estate.

The Strathy revealed last week that the trust wants to bring the estate - including the ski resort and the £20 million funicular - into community control.

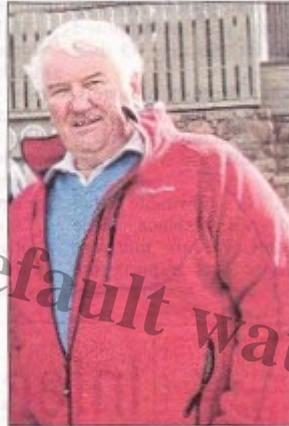
Growing concerns that the wintersports operation at Cairngorm Mountain is being run into the ground - especially given the loss of ski uplift - has spurred the move.

Trust spokesman Alan Bratley told the Strathy yesterday: "None of the interim directors can go into Aviemore without being repeatedly stopped and asked about the community right to buy bid for the Cairngorm Estate from Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

"It is very clear that the local community is right behind the bid.

"And people are keen to see the positive benefits that this will bring for staff on the hill, for businesses in Aviemore, Glenmore and wider strath as well as the tourists, both summer and winter, who come to enjoy everything that we have to offer them."

Mr Bratley said the trust had



ALAN BRATLEY: 'In just five days we've raised more than £2000, but we'll need more donations.'

been busy this week developing its website so that it can share progress with the wider public and they have also been active on social media.

In addition they have already reached their £2000 target to get the wheels in motion for the buy-out attempt.

Mr Bratley explained: "We've set up a crowdfunding page on JustGiving to help to raise the funds that will be required to pay the administration expenses that are involved in putting it all together.

"In just five days we've raised more than £2000.

"But we need donations to continue, so that we can use the funds to publicise the objective of the trust, keep people informed and make the bid successful.

"We've also been in touch with Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey as well as with the Community Ownership Support Service for advice.

"There are other Highlands communities that have already been down the right to buy route and we are seeking to have discussions with some of them so that we can learn from what they have been able to achieve.

"The trust will soon have the voters roll for PE22 and we'll use that to make direct contact with every household in the area.

"But it will take a few weeks before we can get information material printed up and ready for delivery."

The trust is to hold a public drop-in at the Cairngorm Hotel in Aviemore on November 7 so they can outline their plans and take other ideas on board from residents.

■ For more details of the community buy-out bid visit <https://www.Aviemoreglenmoretrust.org> <https://www.facebook.com/AviemoreGlenmoreTrust> and <https://justgiving.com/crowdfunding/cairngormcommunitybuyout>

There is more background on this story at [www.strathspey-herald.co.uk](http://www.strathspey-herald.co.uk)

I believe anyone who cares

about Cairngorm needs to get behind and help the Aviemore and Glenmore Community trust to take over ownership of Cairngorm and develop an alternative plan.

No-one is denying that a clean-up at Cairngorm was well due. There are things that Natural Retreats could have cleared up if it had cared about anything than extracting from the place:

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Some of the infrastructure in Coire na Ciste was a complete mess

Its the failure of HIE to consult on what infrastructure could potentially have been renovated or re-used, their wilful abandonment of standards and the questions of how the damage that has been done will be restored that are the issues.

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How is HIE planning to restore this? .

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Or this?

Since HIE has not released any information on the specification of the works, it appears they want to keep secret how the land affected by the removal of the lift infrastructure will be restored. One of the things that the Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust should be able to bring to Cairngorm is management based on transparency and informed by those who care about the place.

### **Category**

1. Cairngorms

### **Tags**

1. CNPA
2. Freedom of Information
3. HIE
4. natural retreats

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