

More on the artificial ski slope proposal at Cairngorm

Description

When Highlands and Islands Enterprise sold Cairngorm Mountain Ltd to Natural Assets Investment Ltd they did so on the basis that its operational arm, Natural Retreats had the knowledge, competence and financial strength to bring new ideas and new investment to Cairngorm. In the last week further evidence has emerged to show how laughable those claims were.

On 28th March Highland Council sent a memo ([see here for whole document](#)) to the Cairngorms National Park Authority informing them that Natural Retreats had ignored pre-planning consultation advice and failed to provide a Transport Assessment for the proposed new artificial ski slope : (see here)

Background

This proposal is for the installation of two artificial ski slopes adjacent to the existing car park at the Cairngorm Mountain ski area. The combined gross floor area of the new ski slopes is 3000m².

Summary

The Council expects a Transport Assessment to be provided when a new leisure facility exceeds 1000m² gross floor area. Therefore we cannot provide any comment on this application until a Transport Assessment has been provided. This is also in line with previous pre-application advice the applicant has been given.

So, the operators of Cairngorm Mountain were advised what was needed and have failed to provide it. Since HIE's announcement of the artificial ski slope proposal at Cairngorm, Natural Retreats has only had 13 months to get the required assessments together.....

HIE should be taking a good look at what has happened at the Aislabeck Plantation ([see here](#)) in the Yorkshire Dales where today, after 18 months of to and fro, Richmond District Council is finally recommending acceptance of a much amended planning application for new holiday chalets – the number has been reduced significantly. It has taken over 18 months for Natural Retreats to process a planning application to further develop the site there during which much further information has become available including part of the site may be contaminated:

“Significant concerns have been raised about whether the site is contaminated from previous landfill and rifle range uses. This is not a designated contaminated site. Having regard to all relevant matters, Environmental Health considers that the site is not worthy of being so designated. The proposed development would not be sited within the areas previously identified as having been potentially contaminated. The former landfill part of the site is located further downhill and to the south and east of the proposed development, and the former rifle ranges are also further downhill and to the south and east of the proposed development. However, whilst some site investigation work was undertaken in 2004 it is unclear precisely how extensive this investigation was, or to what extent precisely any previous mitigation measures were undertaken, etc. Therefore Environmental Health have recommended, as a reasonable and workable precaution, that, if planning permission is granted, and prior to the commencement of the development, further and adequate Phase I and Phase II site investigations are undertaken in order to establish any and all contamination risks and, in the event that any risks are identified, all necessary remediation. This also substantially reflects the applicant’s contamination report submitted with the application, which has been fully considered. Any works would also be expected to fall outside of the area the subject of the current application sites, and within the previously identified potentially contaminated area that is located at distance.

You can read lots more about this and alleged failures of Natural Retreats to deal with the issues – and indeed how they appeared to have been covered up – in the Committee Report and other documents related to the planning application which the CNPA and HIE would be well advised to consider carefully. However, the most significant point in my opinion is this appears to be a significant liability – which will grow if land owned by others is proved to have been polluted – which the local council in England requires Natural Retreats to address before any development can go ahead. The first condition is that: *“land contamination assessment and mitigation measures required as recommended by Environmental Health”*.

Meantime Natural Retreats have put some of their assets at Aislabeck up for sale ([see here](#)). This business owned by Yorkshire Dales Ltd, together with Cairngorm Mountain Ltd, were the two main businesses owned by Natural Assets Investment Ltd which generated income for the group. The bank HSBC has, according to the accounts, claim to 50% of any assets sold off to cover its loans so selling off these assets will not generate that much revenue for the group. It appears therefore another indication that the group may be in serious financial difficulty yet HIE is still proposing to lend them money at Cairngorm without any explanation of how those loans can be secured.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

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

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