

SE Group Report – HIE ignored its advice on a dry ski slope at Cairn Gorm

Description

Yesterday, Highlands and Islands Enterprise was forced to release the full copy of the Report it had commissioned from SE Group into ski infrastructure at Cairn Gorm. After HIE failed to publish the Report when launching its new vision for Cairn Gorm ([see here](#)), several people submitted freedom of information requests. Then, when the information was still not forthcoming, they asked for a formal review which could have ended up with the Information Commissioner. HIE, who did not have a leg to stand on, have now released the bulk of the Report after a “Review” conducted by their Chief Executive, Charlotte Wright. (The report is 64 MB so too big to publish here and following issue of this post is now on the Cairngorms FOI section of the HIE website ([see here](#)). The Report is titled “*Cairngorm ski area feasibility assessment and strategic plan*”.

While the Report reaches some strange conclusions – no evidence is provided, for example, to explain why the SE Group ever thought a zip wire from the Ptarmigan was feasible – it appears to contain some useful data and should provide the basis for more informed discussion about the future of the ski area. What is striking from a quick read through, however, is what the SE Group said about HIE and Natural Retreats’ dry ski slope proposal (which was rejected by the Cairngorms National Park Authority Planning Committee in October):

Indoor and Artificial Slopes

***Indoor and artificial slopes are very poor options and have not
been suggested for Cairngorm, the re***

and then, after some analysis, which includes consideration of other dry ski slopes in the area:

There is currently a proposal for developing a dry slope at Cairngorms that suggest this may not be the best fit:

- A dry slope may diminish the very qualities that bring Cairngorms to life in summer and winter. People come to Cairngorm Mountain to experience a real alpine environment. The alpine experience is unique within the Aviemore area, which is why many regional visitors simply park in the base area and experience the scenery.

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dry slopes may diminish the natural beauty of the area and makes Cairngorm's location unique.

- Dry slopes can and have been developed all over Scotland. You can go home with virtually the same experience that may be offered elsewhere. To come to Cairngorm to ski on a real snow surface, not an artificial one, new activities should focus on improvements you would expect to find elsewhere.
- While dry slopes could be utilised in the summer, there is a lack of experience at Cairngorm relative to other offerings. This may limit the summer audience more than some other, more established, offerings. Additionally, summer visitors are very different that winter visitors (see *Summer Marketplace* discussion). They are looking for different activities.
- A primary driver for an artificial slope proposal at Cairngorm is to provide a winter experience in the lower mountain/base area in the winter with strategic snowmaking improvements, which will all be done in a real environment—real skiing on a real surface in a real alpine environment.

No wonder HIE did not want the full report released – it shows they ignored the advice they had commissioned. FOI Requests have shown that HIE received the draft report in June, so they must have known their consultants had advised such a development was not appropriate for Cairn Gorm. Yet they still pressed ahead with the Planning Application without making any of this information available to the public or the Cairngorms National Park Authority. CNPA Board Members who rejected the Planning Application should be re-assured that they took the right decision ([see here](#)).

Its because of HIE's reckless disregard for anyone who disagrees with them and their inability to consult properly, which has now gone on for years, that ownership of the Cairn Gorm estate, and responsibility for managing it, needs to be transferred. (HIE needs to remain liable for the financial disaster it has created).

While its difficult to understand why SE Group thought a zip wire would be any more acceptable than a dry ski slope, their comments about what attracts people to Cairngorm, the "alpine environment", "natural beauty" and "real skiing" are spot on. This vision should drive a new plan for Cairn Gorm. HIE need to release the full SE Group report to all stakeholders, including the Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust, as soon as possible so it can be used to inform a new plan.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

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

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