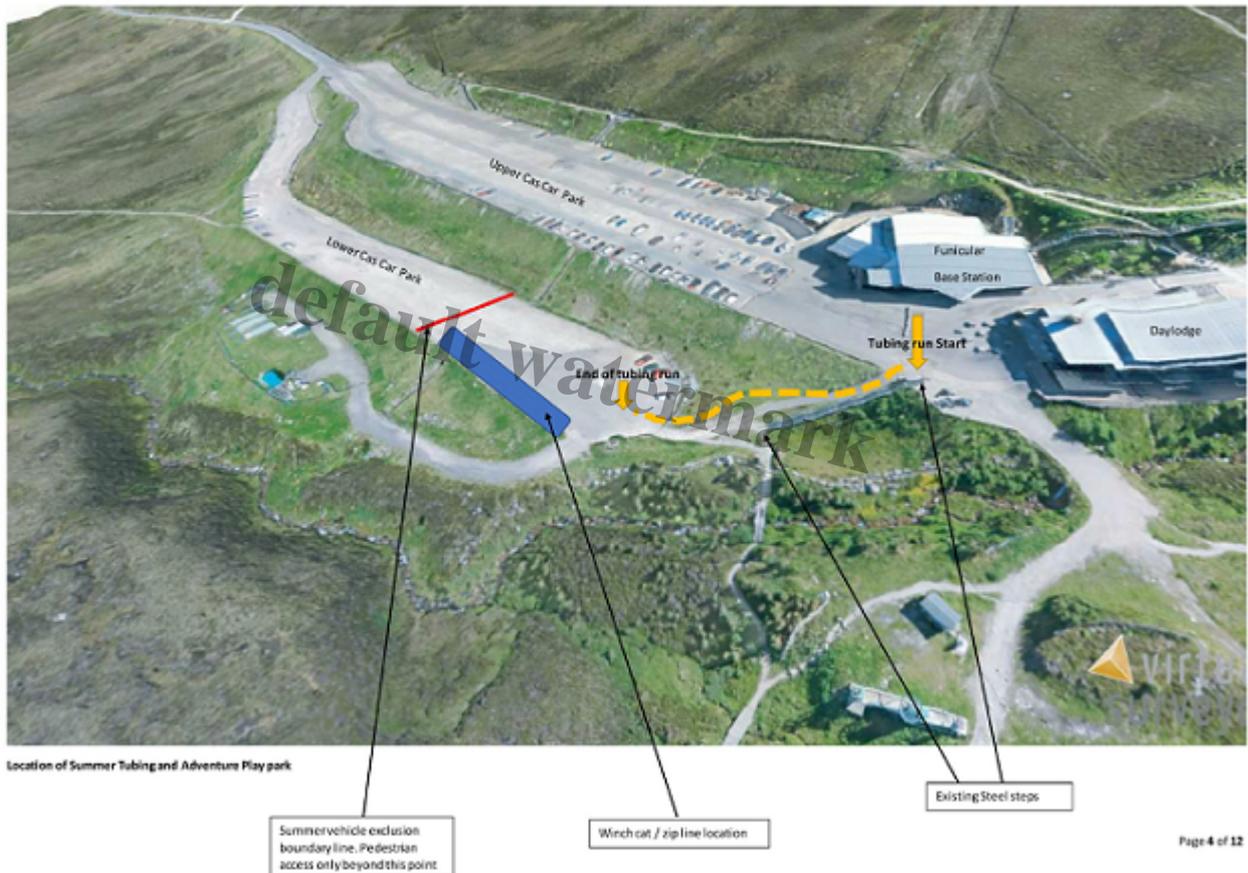


HIE's latest misconceived proposal for Cairn Gorm - a tube slope and adventure playground.

Description



Location of HIE's proposed new tube slope, zip wires and play area in Coire Cas carpark

Just six weeks after the Cairngorms National Park Authority adopted a set of working principles for future development at Cairn Gorm ([see here](#)), including the need for a masterplan BEFORE any new Planning Applications were considered, guess what? Highlands and Islands Enterprise has submitted yet another Planning Application to Highland Council for Cairn Gorm ([see here](#)) - without any reference to said masterplan or when it might be developed.

Key features for the Piste Machine play element.

- 2 x zip lines running side by side
- 2 x stainless steel chutes 2.5m
- 1 x central scramble net, made from combi rope
- 2 x pole descents
- 2 x HDPE pipe tunnels
- 1 x enclosed wall between both tunnels with 3 port holes, benches on the inside den between both tunnels
- 1 x cab with 3 seats and steering wheels

The play park components of the Planning Application

There is of course an urgent need for action at Cairn Gorm. With the funicular broken, HIE and its subsidiary, Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd, have very little income to pay the existing workforce over the summer. There are no reserves. HIE and the Minister responsible, Fergus Ewing, believe they need to be seen to act. Hence, I believe, this planning application.

HIE, however, have now been back in charge of the mountain for over six months. In that time have made NO attempt to consult either stakeholder groups or the wider public about the future of Cairn Gorm. Indeed, they have refused all requests to release the engineering reports into what's wrong with the funicular or the costs of repairing it. What happens to the funicular is central to any plan about the future of Cairn Gorm. Instead, HIE have commissioned the SE Group from the USA to review their pie in the sky £27m Vision for Cairn Gorm ([see here](#)) but so far have published nothing. There was no mention of a tube slide or play park in the first version of that vision. Just how this new planning application fits with the previous proposals for a mountain roller coaster or whatever new vision HIE is now secretly developing is not clear.



Images showing similar winch cat play design with gravel finish.

Illustration from planning application of what the play park might look like

HIE won't even consult local businesses about what might help the local economy. Just two weeks ago, on 1st May, at the Aviemore Business breakfast, Susan Smith, the new Chief Executive of Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd, did say she was trying to find £200k to fund a Kids Adventure Area in the Lower Cas carpark. She gave no indication a Planning Application was imminent. Nor did she ask for views about whether this would be money well spent. In the Strathly today she is quoted as saying:

This new product is part of a phased play development which we are looking to improve and develop over the coming summers while balancing the functionality of snow clearing in the car parks.

•

Clear evidence that HIE has a lot more up its sleeve. Its an organisation that appears incapable of acting in an open an honest manner, let alone explaining its long term intentions for the ski area as requested by the CNPA.

HIE, however, does appear to have learned one lesson from Natural Retreats and the dry ski slope debacle. The proposed tube will be made out of Neveplast:

Summer Tubing Slide



artificial snow fun **neveplast**

Tubby is a very popular and can be used by everyone, both adults and kids, enjoy sliding at high speed sitting down inside the snow-tubes. The speed of the snow-tubes is guaranteed by the artificial Neveplast surface, with which Tubby is made, highly technological and certified with the **same slipperiness of the snow**. Tubby slides can be straight or with parabolic turns according to the topography of the ground on which they are installed.

The slides, whatever model they are, TUBBY, TUBBY Evolution or TUBBY Evolution Plus, are all interchangeable and constituted by Mt. 2,0 x 2,0 modules. Assembling the modules with the proper systems...

it is possible to realize slides of any dimension. The shortest slide which has been realized is Mt. 14 long whereas the longest one is 430 metres long.

Neveplast Srl has realized **more than 1.000 Tubby slides** all over the world with great satisfaction of all our customers. Thanks to its use and management **easiness**.

Tubby has obtained great success which has allowed to insert Tubby in main theme, amusement and water parks, in towns, beaches and ski resorts, allowing the functionality of the conveyor belts all year long.

The simplicity of management together with the **guarantee of safety** for the users, make it suitable for all age groups. Tubby is obtaining

huge success all over the world. Tubby was invented by the Italian Neveplast in 2003, which continued to develop the product from year to year by continuing to offer new accessories.

The Neveplast TUBBY slide will be supplied with:

- Correct Assembly certification
- Final Inspection
- User manual
- Tubby slide rules
- Calculation Report
- TÜV Sud Type certification (It is mandatory to have PVC lateral side profiles)
- Eco-friendly certification of the product

Extract from Planning Application design statement

Natural Retreats had proposed the dry ski snow ski slope should be made out of snowflex, a material requiring a sprinkler system to operate - useless in freezing conditions. Activists discovered that Natural Retreats had never sought a quote from Neveplast and that the snowflex quote was TWICE the likely cost of Neveplast. Despite have committed to provide £1.5m in funding towards the dry ski slope, HIE refused to investigate this before Natural Retreats' proposal were considered by the CNPA Planning Committee. The CNPA, by refusing the dry ski slope on landscape grounds, not only did the right thing, they saved the public purse a small fortune. Perhaps Susan Smith, the HIE employee who was previously in charge of their contract with Natural Retreats, could say if she still believes HIE were right not to investigate the decision to choose snowflex?

Once again, a development in the wrong place



Extract from planning application

There is nothing wrong with tubing facilities or play parks for children. Midlothian Council has a tubing slope at the Hillend dry ski slope ([see here](#)). This costs £8.40 an hour for children and £10.40 for adults, has been popular and makes the enterprise almost as much money as the dry ski slope. One can understand why HIE might be interested. They are, according to the Strathy, proposing to charge £5 for a "timed session", whatever that is. But is Coire Cas, which is situated 2000ft up, the right place for this? Given the weather and that the site its facing into the prevailing winds for how much of the year will it be actually used? HIE describe it as a summer facility, 2-3 months perhaps compared to say 10 months at Hillend.



Image 3

Panorama of Tubing route at side of the metal steps into the lower Car park

Extract from planning application looking down the line of the 'tube'•

Interestingly, I understand that Nevis Range are considering relocating their Zoom Trax ([see here](#)), a similar concept but half the size, from the top of the gondola to the bottom. That would enable the Zoom Trax to be used when the gondola was not operating. While people can drive up to the Coire Cas carpark at any time, this is the sort of visitor facility that would be much better located down the hill.

The only good thing about the 'attraction'• is that it could be removed fairly easily. I suspect that will result in the planners at the CNPA either failing to call it in from Highland Council or recommending its approval, perhaps on a temporary basis pending submission of a 'masterplan'•. Given the impact of the snow factory on the immediate environment, it will be easy to argue the landscape impact of a tube and play park would be relatively minor and this, like the snow factory, should be agreed as a temporary measure.



Extract from the Planning Application – looking up the line of the proposed tube to the snow machines

Conceptually, however, this photo shows why the proposal is so wrong. The Coire Cas car park is an unattractive mess, made worse by the snow machines (which were granted temporary planning permission without any consideration of their environmental impact ([see here](#))). The trees in the photo which will be removed by the tubing, while few and small, point to what should be central to future plans for Cairn Gorm, the natural environment.

Promoting further tree regeneration around the car park is the best way to improve the visitor experience and to attract people to Cairn Gorm.

HIE seems incapable of appreciating the environmental potential of the mountain or that the natural environment is the way to attract visitors. Instead of the obsession with visitor attractions, promote Cairn Gorm as a great area for families to walk (when the weather is good) and to see mountain plants and animals. Most visitors, for example, never appreciate that Cairn Gorm is probably the best place in the country to view Ring Ouzel. Why can't HIE put up a couple of webcams or a visitor hide and promote this as the RSPB do so successfully at Loch Garten? This would provide a far more memorable experience to families and their children than a play park on the edge of a grotty neglected car park. It would also be in accord with the statutory aims of the Cairngorms National Park.

When the CNPA adopted their working principles for future development at Cairn Gorm at the end of March, I believe they were keen to shift the focus away from misconceived visitor attractions. Unfortunately, that has had no influence on HIE and the CNPA is, I believe, too weak to make a stand. (I will consider this further in a post on the Ptarmigan Planning Application which is due to be considered by the CNPA Planning Committee next week ([see here](#))). That's why the only way that the way Cairn Gorm is managed will change is if stakeholders, including the local community and local

businesses, along with the wider public demand that HIE is removed from the mountain.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. Cairn Gorm
2. CNPA
3. HIE
4. natural retreats
5. planning
6. Tourism

Date Created

May 16, 2019

Author

nickkempe

default watermark