The Cairngorm Mountain Coaster (2) â?? Environmental Issues.

Description

default watermark



Photo Credit Alan Brattey 26/06/2019.

This is a picture of the Fiacaill ridge in Coire Cas which is being proposed as the new site for the Mountain Coaster, an idea which is, I am reliably informed, already attracting a lot of interest, and not in a positive way.



Photo credit Alan Brattey 26/06/2019.

The second photo is a close up of the same area showing how natural and undamaged it is at present, but without a concentrated effort by all concerned that could soon change.

On its website, the Aviemore & Glenmore Community Trust say *â??It (the mountain coaster) is low noise and has a low visual and environmental impactâ?•.* So letâ??s examine that statement.

Low Noise. Anyone who has visited a fairground will know that a roller coaster makes quite a bit of noise as first the cars are dragged up a steep slope to the release point at the top and then more noise from bearings, rollers and people, as a car comes down the track. Whether or not a mountain coaster is quieter and by how much, has not been established as there does not appear to be any data published by the A&GCT or the SE Group report as to noise levels in decibels.

Low Visual Impact. Two pictures are shown (see here) to support this theory. One shows a coaster in a forest which I agree dramatically reduces the visual impact, but would not be the case on the Fiacaill ridge. The next is on a snow covered hillside but again against a backdrop of trees. Also, that picture is taken from several hundred yards away and yet it still stands out. Remember, this is a shiny steel track, with supports, of maybe 1000m in length with no vegetation tall enough to mitigate the visual impact. Its hard to see how the Cairngorms National Park Authority, who rejected the dry ski slope on landscape grounds, could ever accept a Coaster in such a prominent location.

default watermark

Low Environmental Impact. In order to build a Coaster there will have to be new access tracks constructed from the Cas car parks across to the intended base area and then from there up to the top of the coaster, so that the construction materials can be transported to where they are needed. There will also probably be turning areas for vehicular use, although most materials can be stored in the car parks.

The uplift track will almost certainly be straight up, but the return run will have to zigzag across the hillside in order to provide the â??thrillsâ?•. As I said in my first post, no one knows how long the coaster will be, but will cover quite an area of the hillside.

All this will require a significant amount of natural peat and heather to be removed, which if not stored properly may not be in a suitable condition to re-instate the ground after work is completed. There is plenty of evidence of the lack of ground re-instatement on Cairngorm without looking too hard for it. There is also the potential for new water courses to form while all this work is being done, making re-instatement to the present condition well near impossible.

Before any planning application can be entered there are several surveys that will need to be completed:-

(1) A bird and animal survey, a recent Springwatch programme showed a Ring Ouzel feeding a lizard to its young,

(2) A vegetation survey in case there are rare plants on the site that may need specialists to remove/ care for, to allow replanting,

(3) A peat survey to determine the quantity of material that may have to be removed and stored for re-instatement after construction, and,

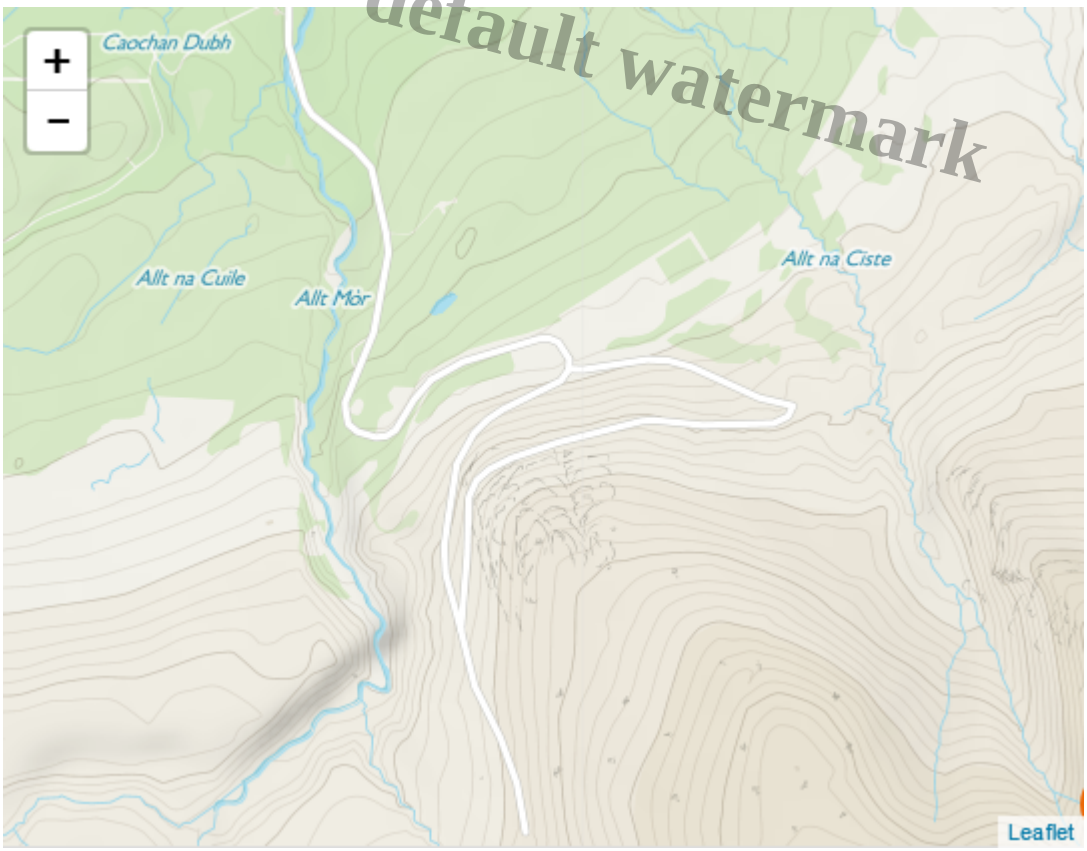
(4) A drainage impact assessment including water quality to satisfy SEPA conditions.

I have no doubt that this is not the full list, but designers/ architects will have to include everything in a planning application.

The challenge is that putting any development here will destroy the potential to enhance lower Coire Cas, for example by creating an alpine scrub zone, which would be good for birds like Ring Ouzel and create a unique visitor attraction. At stake here are two competing visions, one based on visitor â??attractionsâ?• the other based on the natural environment.

What needs to happen.

IF a mountain coaster were to be considered for Cairn Gorm, there is a much more suitable area where the environmental and visual impact would be reduced and that is in the area around the Ciste car park â?? above the forest which is protected â?? and which can be viewed on google earth at grid ref:- 57.147700, -3.663102.



There appears to be several options in this area, although confirmation that the gradient is adequate has not been received from Weigand, who are coaster manufacturers. If purpose designed and constructed here it may be possible to install it from the road/s, with materials being stored in the Ciste car park, thereby reducing the environmental damage and, if re-wilding by trees is included in the project, the visual impact will be reduced as well as the thrill factor being improved. There is the added environmental bonus that major road workings have taken place in the past, and any re-wilding would improve the visual impact of the whole area.

Conclusions

Despite my reservations, I believe that a Mountain Coaster is more sensible than some of the other options on the table at present but not, however, where its currently being proposed.

Its also far less of a priority than ensuring adequate ski uplift is in place and should only be considered once there is an agreed plan in place for that

I can appreciate that, after talking to various people, there are strong arguments against any coaster but, is it not better to have everyone agree on a compromise rather than risk HIE pushing it through regardless as they have done with the Ptarmigan rebuild? Letâ??s present a united front to HIE, based on new ski uplift infrastructure, but leaving room for a mountain coaster as a follow up option and ensuring if it gets built, it will get built in the right place.

Of course, its not really possible to progress any of this until it is known what the outcome of the Funicular situation is, i.e. repair or removal and at what cost, or how much HIE, as owner, has available to invest in Cairngorm, which is the overall deciding factor. Thatâ??s still not clear, despite the news story this week (see below)

default watermark

UPLIFT MUST COME FIRST.



ey
och HERALD

Thursday, July 4, 2019
www.strathspey-herald.co.uk
£1.35 SUBSCRIPTION PRICE:

Revised plans to revive mountain

By Gavin Musgrove
g.musgrove@spp-group.com

REVISED recommendations are being made to breathe new life into Cairngorm Mountain by US experts following the closure of the funicular.

And it appears the resort's mountain railway still has a future.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise have said it can be repaired at least technically although no cost or further details have been given despite it being out of operation since last autumn.

The latest developments come as it emerged that new owners HIE have so far spent almost £2.5 million on infrastructure and keeping the resort running since taking over when the previous operators went into administration towards the end of last year.

The new company Cairngorm Mountain (Scotland) Ltd has also just lodged plans for the first smaller scale proposals aimed at families which it hopes can help attract more visitors.

They have submitted plans to Highland Council for a tube slide, zip line and play area at the Coire Cas car park.

The next and much bigger steps will be informed by the SE Group – authors of a far-reaching report last year on potential investment priorities at Cairngorm Mountain – coming back with updated findings yesterday. They were tasked by HIE to address immediate priorities for investment at Cairngorm with the goalposts having moved because the funicular had been closed on safety grounds since their first recommendations were made.

They state that the immediate priorities should be: Installing Lift A: a base area carpet conveyor lift to improve the beginners' experience

■ Installation of Lift B: a 6-person detachable lift (capacity of 3200 people per hour)

■ Terrain improvements; summer grooming of beginner zone; 8.7 hectares of new terrain and ski routes associated with Lift B

■ Snowmaking over 15.9 hectares

■ Reopening the Sheiling Restaurant

■ Base area lodge improvements, landscaping, outside food and beverage, and base area activities

■ Mountain coaster

TURN TO

default watermark

The funicular could still operate according to the report.

Parkswatch will be covered the latest versions of HIEâ??s new vision for Cairngorms over the next few weeks

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. access rights

2. Cairn Gorm
3. conservation
4. HIE
5. landscape
6. Local communities

Date Created
July 3, 2019
Author
graham-garfoot

default watermark