

The Future For Uplift On Cairngorm – Environmental Aspects

Description



The creation of the shieling rope tow

With the Funicular currently out of action and its future unknown, the recently published SE Group addendum into uplift a Cairn Gorm ([see here](#)) is ostensibly recommending the creation of **8.7 hectares** of new ski terrain in Coire Cas as part of their revised plans. This post explains why this figure is wrong and far more ground will be affected.

The new beginners zone

Besides the new runs, “*Additional grading or summer grooming*” is also recommended to create the large new beginner zone. “Terraforming” is another term to describe what is proposed. In layman’s terms this means rock and heather removal, presumably using bulldozers and possibly even muirburn, with the potential to create new water courses but to certainly alter the landscape. This shows that the

SE Group, despite their international reputation, do not seem to understand the concept of a National Park or what it means to a lot of people.

The picture above shows work in progress in 2015 to create the shieling rope tow and what “summer grooming” to create the new beginner area may involve. The area proposed in the SE Group report (see map below) runs from the Shieling down to the Daylodge area, and from the Funicular track across to the Car park tow, just visible on the right, i.e. a much wider and longer area than that affected by the creation of the Shieling rope tow.

A view of the area affected is shown in the next picture and gives a better idea of how much “summer grooming” will be required, although the lower part of the Car park tow is not visible. The lower boundaries for the area will be roughly where the snow fence is on the far right and the zig zag fence just to the right and above the Daylodge.

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Within this an area of approximately **3.1 hectares** proposed for snowmaking. What will happen on the rest is anyone's guess. There is no statement in the SE Group addendum as to how or how much material will be removed, and maybe deposited somewhere else or used to fill in depressions to "create a smoother surface".

The new ski runs

As I pointed out at the beginning, the proposal is for **8.7 hectares** of "new terrain associated with Lift B". The following tables list the positions for the terrain improvements and snow making, the area affected in hectares and the costs of snowmaking and terrain works. A hectare incidentally is 10,000 sq. m. :-

Figure 4. Capital Costs – Snowmaking

Snowmaking Zone	Hectares	Cost per Hectare	Capital Cost
Beginner Zone	3.1	£137,333	£434,733
Trail B1	4.9		£668,117
Trail B2	2.7		£374,001
Trail B3	2.3		£316,633
Trail B4	2.9		£394,031
Total Snowmaking	15.9		£2,187,515

Notes:

Snowmaking assumption based on industry average pricing per hectare of proposed coverage.
More accurate estimates may be determined upon further design and analysis of the site, regulatory and operation-specific circumstances.

Figure 5. Capital Costs – Terrain

Terrain	Hectares	Cost per Hectare	Capital Cost
Summer Grooming			
Beginner Zone			£100,000
New Terrain			
Top of B1	0.4	£35,000	£13,650
B2	2.4		£82,775
B5 (Connecting to Fiacaill Ridge)	3.2		£110,332
B3	2.8		£97,653
Total of New Terrain	8.7		£304,410

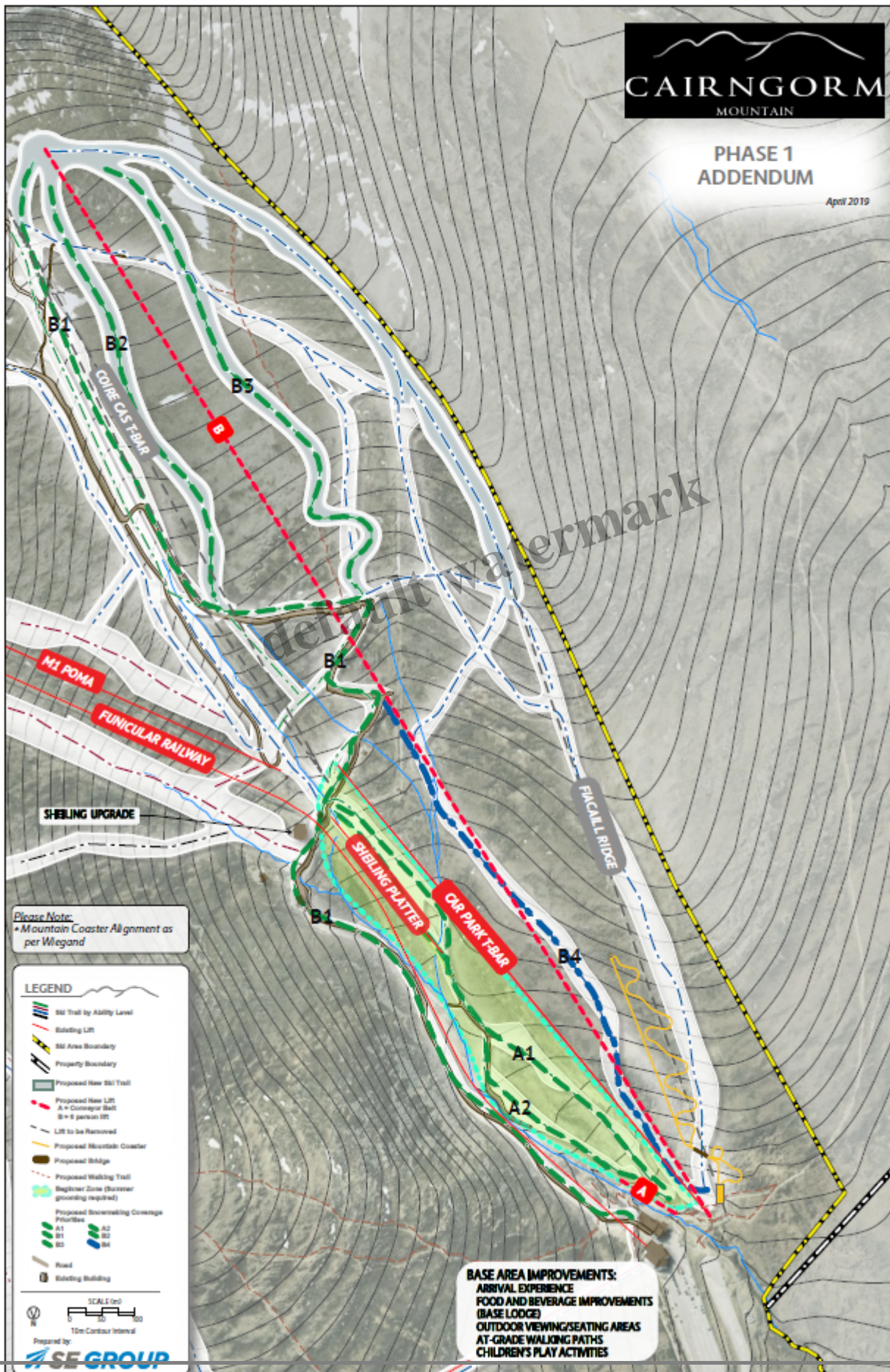
Notes:

Looking at the second table on terrain costs there is no figure for the size of the beginner zone, so I had assumed from the Snowmaking chart that it is 3.1 hectares or 31,000 sq. m. I have now done a rough measurement of the size of the beginner zone and found it is probably over **6 hectares or 60,000 sq. m.**

This would alter the row for “Total of New Terrain”, including the beginner zone, to approx. **15.0 hectares or 150,000 sq. m.**, not 8.7 hectares, (strangely enough the area proposed for snowmaking is 15.9 hectares), and a capital cost of **£525,000** not £404,410.

If we take a look at the map of the proposals, its very poorly labelled. The “new terrain” at the “top of B1” referred to in the table presumably means the area from the top of Lift B to the top of the current Cas tow.

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Runs B2 and B3 are completely new terrain and have dimensions, by my measurements, of approximately (B2) 700m long x 34m wide, and (B3) 800m x 35m, which comes to about what is quoted in the table. However, while B2 is 2.4 hectares it needs 2.7 hectares of snowmaking, whereas B3 is larger at 2.8 hectares and yet only requires 2.4 hectares of snowmaking!

The status of run B4 on the map is unclear because although its shown as an existing run there is nothing on the ground where it is depicted. The snowmaking table describes it as comprising 2.9 hectares or 29,000 sq. m. If that were added to the new terrain table, that would increase the “total of New Terrain” to almost 18 hectares or 180,000 sq. m. and the capital cost to £630,000.

B5 is not shown on the map either but appears to run from the top of lift B to... where exactly? The table describes it as “connecting to Fiacaill ridge” but from the size and colour of the area shown on the map it appears that it should have been described as “connecting to the top of the Fiacaill Ridge tow”. Not quite the same!

Correct me if this already exists, but the map is also showing a run that starts off from the top part of the Fiacaill Ridge tow up track for about 1/3rd of its length but then veers off to one side only rejoining near the bottom of the lift! Is this new terrain as well? If it is then it has not been included in the new terrain figures and, as it looks roughly the same size as B5, could add another 32,000 sq. m. at a cost of £112,000 giving a “total of new terrain” of about 212,000 sq. m. and a capital cost of £842,000.

Also not mentioned is the laying of water pipes and electrics for the snow guns and snowfactory and the ground they stand on or the groundworks needed for the new uplift. There must be other things I have missed. Either way the amount of ground affected is not the 8.7 hectares we are being lead to believe and the costs are likely to be far more than those quoted .

Conclusions

In my opinion, all this terrain grading, summer grooming, terraforming, call it what you will, has the potential to be a huge environmental disaster for Coire Cas and the Cairngorm National Park. The ski terrain already exists in the Ptarmigan/ Ciste ski area so why cause even more destruction?

It has been pointed out to me that it is not a sensible idea to take beginners to the top of Coire Cas on lift B, and then expect them to ski the almost 2km back down. How long would it take them to do that?

The sensible option for uplift, with the Funicular out of action, is to build a chairlift to the Ptarmigan with a mid-station at the Shielling allowing the Shielling Platter to be brought into use for the beginner area as was available in the past, leaving all other tows intact. This also allows use for summer visitors. The money saved from NOT demolishing the Cas and Fiacaill tows and all the associated terrain grading, could be put to better use on that uplift allowing access to the whole mountain when skiing is available and less damage to the mountain as a whole.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

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