

HIE's proposals to smooth and regrade land at Cairn Gorm

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This post takes a further look at the issues ([see here](#)) associated with the latest Planning Application (2019/0247/DET) by Highlands and Islands Enterprises/ Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd at Cairn Gorm. The application is to create a beginners ski area over an area of 0.93 ha or 9,300 sq.m. in the lower right-hand half of the picture above ([see here for planning documents](#)).

On 05/08/2019 the Cairngorms National Park Authority called in this planning application. In their email to Highland Council they said:-

“Works consist of a significant area of re-grading in a sensitive landscape area; therefore the application is considered to raise issues of significance to the National Park”.

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Example of ground smoothing from plans showing extent of work

The response from SNH, which can be viewed on the CNPA planning page, was that they had no objection, a stance which I have asked them and their head office to re-consider on the grounds that it undermines the CNPA's position.

If the CNPA consider 9,300 sq. m. of "terra forming", "summer grooming", engineering works or to put it

in laymans' terms – bulldozing – to be a significant area, what does that say about the the other 220,000 sq. m. proposed in the addendum to the SE Group Report on the future of snow sport infrastructure at Cairn Gorm?

The sectional maps supplied by CMSL show depths to be filled of 1 – 2 metres, which is why I have described this as “bulldozing”. That amount of soil and peat being removed and re-deposited is not going to be done by hand!

In March this year, at the time of the Ptarmigan planning application, the CNPA asked HIE to formulate and provide a “masterplan” for the future of Cairn Gorm before any more applications were made after their Board meeting of 29/03/2019 adopted a set of working principles for the mountain ([see here](#)).

HIE has been promising a masterplan for several years and despite spending circa £100k with the SE Group to provide a basis for such a plan, it has still not been produced. Instead we had the tubing slide application ([see here](#)) followed now by this bulldozing application which completely ignores the not unreasonable request by the CNPA and also goes to show the complete lack of consideration and even contempt for another government agency by HIE/ CMSL.

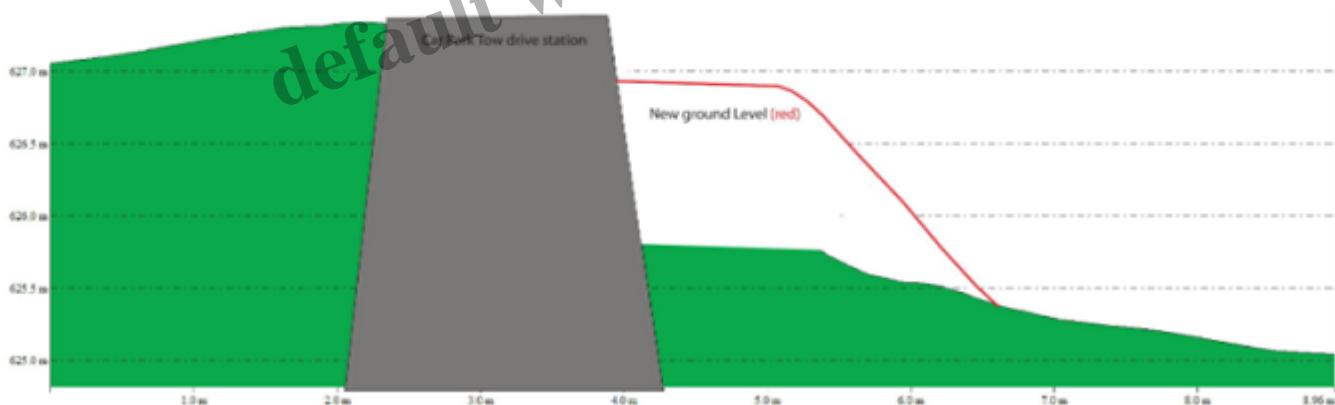
In my post of 25/07/2019 [The Future For Uplift On Cairngorm – Environmental Aspects](#) I worked out the approximate area for “summer grooming”, as proposed in the SE Group addendum, and it came to 229,000 sq. m. The area proposed for the whole of the beginner zone was about 77,000 sq. m. so it will only be a matter of time before more planning applications are forthcoming.

The justification for the proposal is that it will allow the factory produced snow to be spread more easily and costs will be reduced, but what also should be taken into consideration is:-

- (1) Bulldozing could cost £35,000, according to the SE Group, as against heather cutting of between £200 and £400 for the area involved, figures courtesy of Scottish Natural Heritage,
- (2) There will be no point in re-vegetating the smoothed off slope with heather saved from the excavated areas, as that will defeat the point of the exercise. This will leave a permanent scar on the hillside,
- (3) Thousands of skiers have learned to ski on Cairn Gorm as it is now, without all this “smoothing”,
- (4) Considering the problematic performance of the snow factory in the 2018/19 ski season ([see here](#)), there is no proof that those problems have been overcome,
- (5) If the Funicular is to be repaired and brought back into operation for the 2020/21 ski season, then spending £35,000 to provide a featureless beginner slope for one year is not economically viable or sensible, and,

Section through Areas K
Plan to Scale 1:200

2019/0247/DET



Area K is by the car park lift station

(6) Area “K” in the application has nothing to do with a beginners slope. It is about the safety of employees working on the Carpark drive station, which must be a priority, although it does look as though it could be just a convenient dumping point for unused materials from the bulldozing. It raises the question that if this was part of the Health & Safety Executive investigation from 06/12/2018, why has it not been actioned before now?

What needs to happen

The CNPA with the help and support of Forestry and Land Scotland, the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, SNH and other statutory bodies should put this and any future planning applications by CMSL on hold until HIE provide the “Masterplan” that has been promised for so long. The North East Mountain Trust and Mountaineering Scotland have already stated their objections and

taken a lead against the planning application. Let's hope they are not the only ones and this gets stopped now. You have until 02/09/2019 to raise objections.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. Cairn Gorm
2. CNPA
3. HIE
4. planning
5. restoration
6. scottish natural heritage

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