Cairngorm Mountain Ski Resort, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Masterplan.

Description

Sometime between August 2019 and February 2020, the webpage (see here) isn't dated, the Highlands and Islands Enterprises (HIE) website was updated with the following information on Cairn Gorm under "regional projects":-

A UNIQUE ASSET FOR SCOTLAND

Cairngorm is a place of outstanding natural beauty - a wild mount
environment that is home to many examples of flora and fauna.

As a mountain resort, it is also a key driver of the economy of Str
Badenoch, at the heart of the Cairngorms National Park.

In public ownership through HIE, Cairngorm estate has strong po
and sustain its reputation as one of Scotland's most important de
attracting thousands of visitors every year and playing a key role i
mountain resort sector. We're committed to both protecting and e
Cairngorm's wonderful natural environment. We're also working t
mountain's positive impact on the local economy through helping
sustainable resort business catering for thousands of visitors eve

The mountain is properly spelled Cairn Gorm not Cairngorm!

No one can disagree with the first two paragraphs (Ed. see above!] although in para.2 the wording should have been "*the WINTER economy*", as by all accounts there has been an improvement in the Spring, Summer and Autumn trade since the Funicular closed.

But then with para.3 it all starts to go wrong.

As long as the estate is owned by HIE, with their continuing support and determination to repair the dysfunctional Funicular railway, it has been proved that the ski resort will never be economically viable and will therefore only fail again in the near future. I will come back to this later.

"*both protecting and enhancing Cairngorm's wonderful natural environment*"!

Repair or demolition of the Funicular makes a mockery of this statement as the work involved is going to turn the hill into an eyesore while the work is underway and for several years after, until the natural vegetation starts to recover. Also, planning permission is now in place to bulldoze, by my estimation, over 11,000sq.m. of Corrie Cas this summer and the potential to bulldoze another 200,000+sq.m., if the findings of the SE Group reports of 2018/19 (see here) are followed.

The next statement from the HIE webpage is as follows:-

SHARE YOUR VIEWS ON THE FUTURE OF CAIRNGORM

Members of the public are invited to put forward ideas on how Cairng
can sustain and enhance its role in underpinning a wide range of bus
community, sports and leisure activities to benefit future generations

We have commissioned specialists Threesixty Architecture and Jura
Consultants to prepare a new masterplan for Cairngorm, tapping into
knowledge, ambitions and ideas of a broad range of stakeholders. Yo
information shared at a series of public events in the Masterplanning
below.

If you're as passionate about Cairngorm as we are, we want to hear y
on what the masterplan should cover.

There have been four public events held at which "members of the public" could engage with the masterplanners, all held in Aviemore and the surrounding areas: 55 people attended the meeting in Grantown; 35 in Kingussie. With the total number from all the events being reported to be over 175 (but presumably therefore less than 180!), Aviemore and the Cairngorm Daylodge could only have seen about 90 people attending!

Contrast this with the numbers of skiers in Scotland, as set out in the report HIE commissioned from the SE Group in 2018 (page 23):-

Skiing

Skiers in the UK. ± 6.3 million (around 10% of the national population;)

Skiers in Scotland. ± 120,000 recreational skiers

Scottish Ski Club. ± 1,200 members

Snow Factor in Braehead (Glasgow). ±500,000 people having chosen to learn to ski there.

"If you are as passionate about Cairngorm as we are, we want to hear your views".

Well we all know now how passion in the local community was stifled from the post by Alistair Bell on Corporate Gaslighting (see here): *"The sad answer is, we killed skiing at Cairngorm"!*

Not a single event has been held in Scotland's two largest cities.

Both Braehead, Glasgow's indoor snow ski slope, and Hillend, Edinburgh's artificial ski slope, have facilities available for these kinds of meetings and would therefore have been ideal choices for consultation. From the SE Group report there are about 120,000 Scottish skiers (it is not clear if that figure includes snowboarders) and Braehead has reported figures in excess of 500,000 having learned to ski there. Presumably Hillend would have had similar numbers if not more.

It was not until the masterplanners were asked about this lack of public consultation that the online questionnaires (see here) appeared on the HIE website. Prior to this, the only public engagement had been through a list of questions emailed to the approximately 1900 members/ Facebook followers of the Aviemore & Glenmore Community Trust (AGCT) on 20/01/2020. This also appeared on the AGCT facebook page. Replies were only accepted until the following Monday, 27/01/2020! That meant that at most the grand consultation involved less than 2% of recreational skiers in Scotland and there was no mention of engagement with any others who may be affected by the Cairngorm Masterplan.

Since then, however, campaigners have tried to address this failure and sent the links to the questionnaires to other organisations including Snowsport England, Snowsport Scotland, British Cycling, Scottish Cycling, with requests to forward them to all their affiliated clubs and others so that a far wider range of interests are able to contribute to the Masterplan.

Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd eventually posted the link to the consultation on its Facebook Page on Sunday 23/02/2020. Sunday 08/03/2020 is the final date for all comments. Given that their entire business and workforce depend on an economically sustainable, satisfactory and viable outcome to the current situation, surely they should have been promoting the masterplan from the very start?

Beneath the section on the HIE website on Share Your Views, there is a section on:

"Masterplanning:Creating A Shared Vision For The Future

The following is from subsection 3 “Context In Aviemore And Glenmore Corridor” (see here):

VISITORS & TOURISM

Tourism is extremely important to the local economy, as shown in the table. For this analysis, the local area has been defined as the Aviemore and Glenmore Corridor. This is where most of the workforce is likely to be based and the majority of local impacts from the resort’s activities will accrue.

There are an estimated 650 tourism accommodation providers in the Badenoch and Strathspey area, with 250 serviced accommodation providers (hotels, guests houses and B&Bs) providing 5,000 bed spaces and 400 non-serviced accommodation providers (self-catering, touring and camping facilities) providing 9,000 beds.

	Total Employees	To
Full Time	1,400	
Part Time	850	
Total	2,250	

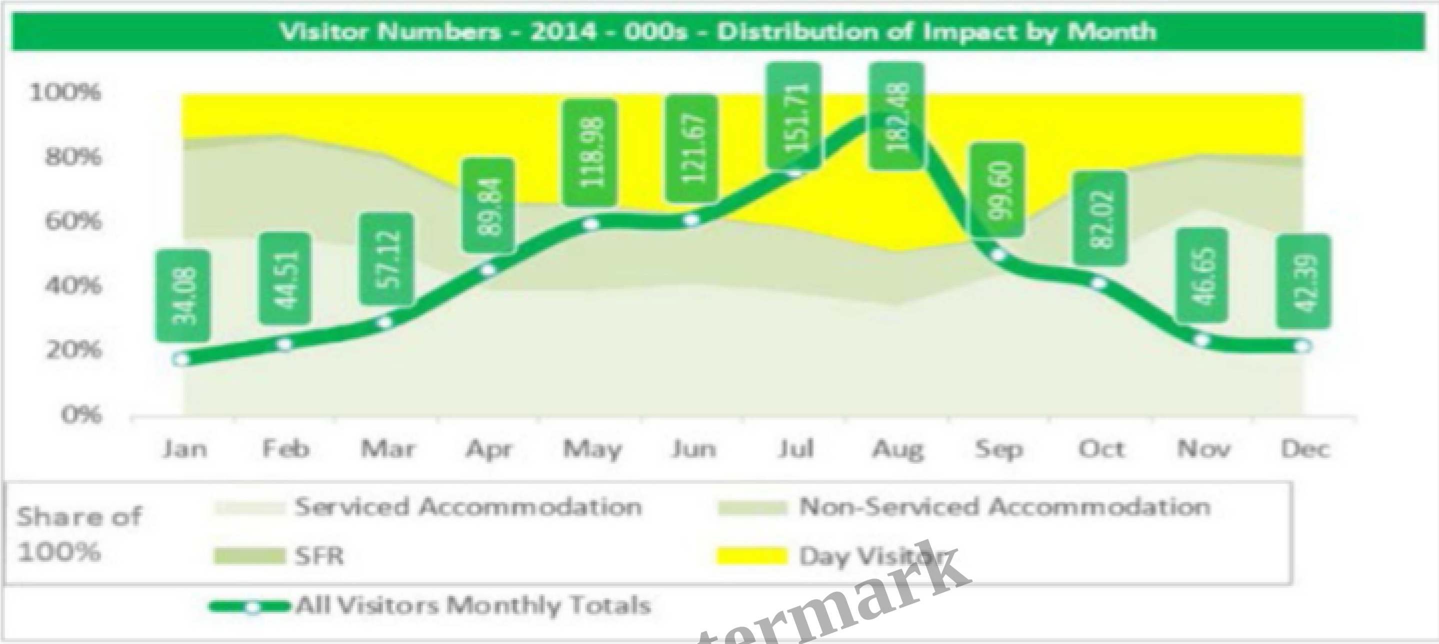
The most important aspect of the table is the lack of dates and time periods. The total number of employees in the tourist sector is shown as 900, 40% of the workforce, but that will not be the case 12 months of the year. The table also does not indicate how many of those “employed” are on zero hours contracts!

The table also states there are 9,000 beds available in the wider Badenoch and Strathspey area! This implies that some of those accommodation providers must be really feeling it in the winter months, **BUT** that is totally misleading, as it is not mentioned how many of them close for annual holidays, repairs, maintenance etc! It may be that it is mostly hotels which stay open helping to retain their regular staff. One wonders why have these figures not been included. Is this another attempt by HIE to divert people’s attention from the real issues?

Contrast the latest dumbing down of data with Page 22 of the SE Group report of 2018:-

[Part One: Analysis. The Complexity of the Existing Condition]

Figure 5. Badenoch and Strathspey Visitor Numbers (2014)



Source: Steam Final Trend Report 2009–2014 – Badenoch and Strathspey (GTS [UK] Ltd)

Albeit at lower levels, there are still over 30,000 to 40,000 visitors per month to the area over the winter. In terms of the number of visitor days spent in the area, summer peaks in August are almost 450,000 (2014), while winter months average 100,000+, November is the lowest at 107,000 (2014) and February highest at just under 150,000. The pattern of visitor numbers and visitor days spent in the area across the year demonstrate the dominance of the summer offering and the area's short-break appeal, while the additional winter offer is likely to be important in helping to create year-round appeal.

Although the information is from 2014, the graph shows the visitor monthly totals which indicate that visitor numbers are at their lowest from November until March. That is why I raised the point about employment in the tourism market. Also how different are those tourism figures for 2019 and the beginning of 2020?

Gordon Bulloch in his recent post on the *"Cairn Gorm masterplan consultation – the public survey and the flaws in the process"* (see here) included a table on "Scottish Ski Centre Skier Numbers and Market Shares 2004 – 2018", courtesy of Mr Alan Brattey. With his permission I have reworked the chart:

Winter	Glencoe		Nevis Range		The Lecht		Glenshee	
	360m	1070m	655m	1221m	645m	775m	650m	1070m
	Skiers	%Market	Skiers	%Market	Skiers	%market	Skiers	%Market
2004	7,000	4.3	20,855	12.7	50,636	30.8	27,471	16.7
2005	12,000	8.2	18,338	12.5	25,252	17.2	36,000	24.5
2006	16,623	10.7	18,430	11.9	22,303	14.4	42,460	27.4
2007	7,623	9.7	11,149	14.1	13,200	16.7	8,521	10.8
2008	23,000	13.9	23,021	13.9	18,061	10.9	39,007	23.6
5yr Total	66,246		91,793		129,452		153,459	
5yr Ave	13,249	9.32	18,359	12.92	25,890	18.22	30,692	21.6

	Glencoe		Nevis Range		The Lecht		Glenshee	
2009	16,899	10.6	15,876	9.9	19,110	12	43,000	26.9
2010	26,135	7	34,686	9.3	52,147	13.9	116,614	31.1
2011	14,037	4.8	18,289	6.3	40,678	14	95,571	33
2012	10,614	8.1	9,788	7.4	10,856	8.3	33,947	25.8
2013	24,000	8.3	16,668	5.7	44,429	15.3	92,899	31.9
5yr Total	91,685		95,307		167,220		382,031	
5yr Ave	18,337	7.35	19,061	7.64	33,444	13.41	76,406	30.64
%change		-1.97		-5.28		-4.81		9.04

	The Lecht		Nevis Range		Glencoe		Glenshee	
2014	16,075	6.8	25,711	10.9	31,578	13.4	84,397	35.9
2015	31,218	13.4	29,375	12.6	35,046	15.2	58,407	25.6
2016	25,156	12.1	26,760	12.9	29,488	14.2	59,126	28.5
2017	4,002	7.5	10,348	19.3	5,941	11.1	12,111	22.6
2018	40,047	16	33,000	13.2	41,431	16.6	76,367	30.6
5yr Total	116,498		125,194		143,484		290,408	
5yr Ave	23,300	11.9	25,039	12.8	28,697	14.7	58,082	29.7
%change		-1.51		5.16		7.35		-0.94

Columns arranged by market share over each five year period

Because the figures were originally over 10 and then 5 years, I decided to split them into 5 year periods. This I think gives a better idea of the changes overall and could be used to predict the next 5 years. Colouring also makes it easier to understand. It important to emphasise these figures are from before the funicular closed and have therefore not been affected by it.

What immediately stands out is the performance figures for Glencoe. In the first two 5 year periods they had the lowest average % skiiers and then doubled them in the next 5, moving them up to third on the table. Maybe the masterplanners should be looking at Glencoe to see what they are doing to produce such an improvement!

Cairn Gorm has consistently had the best part of the market, probably because it has the highest slopes and therefore suffered less in the winters of 2007, 2012 and 2017. Nevis range at the same height probably suffers more because of its westerly position.

Unfortunately the next figure that really stands out is in the final row. From an average high of 40.95% for the 5 years to 2013, Cairngorms share of the market SLUMPED by a massive 10.15%. The reason for that should be investigated as part of the masterplanning process.

There is a rather strange pattern in the figures, 2007, 2012 and 2017 stand out as being poor winters, all 5 years apart!

The latest figures I have are for 2019 and show a completely different picture.

	Nevis Range		Glenshee		Cairngorm		Glencoe		The Lec
2019	2377	4.37	7989	14.68	9022	16.58	9030	16.59	2600
%change		-8.43		-15.02		-14.26		1.89	

Is this trend due to the snowfactories? Nevis Range and Glenshee didn't have them last year, Cairngorm Mountain's was plagued with various problems including Health & Safety issues. Glencoe? But the Lecht certainly seemed to get it right. The 2020 figures are going to make for some interesting reading and analysis.

Conclusions

HIE are still persisting in their preferred option to have the Funicular repaired. If it gets the go ahead, this will almost certainly see the numbers for Cairngorm remaining on the low side for at least winter 2021 and even maybe 2022 and 2023 given the time it will take to appoint contractors, get the necessary planning permission and for the work to be done.

The Masterplanners are hopefully going to ignore the short-sighted views of HIE and LISTEN to the people they have interviewed, READ the replies from people who took the time to complete their surveys, and UNDERSTAND the ideas of people who have sent proposals to them, the very people who will ultimately bring in the revenues to Cairngorm Mountain, and the businesses that depend on its winter trade, THE PAYING PUBLIC.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

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