

The corona crisis and the funicular planning application

Description

1st April

Cairngorms National Park Authority
14 The Square
Grantown on Spey
Scotland
PH26 3HG

Dear Sir,

Planning application 2020/0076/DET Engineering works for strengthening funicular viaduct, Cairngorm Mountain, Glenmore, Aviemore, Highland, P1RB

I refer to the above application and must inform you that Aviemore and Vicinity Community Council while supporting the application wishes to make the following comments;

- 1) The timing of the application seems to pre-empt the publication of the re community consultation on the future of Cairngorm.
- 2) It is also understood that HIE are to produce a Masterplan for the future of mountain, which would include a review of all the options for the funicular (repair/replacement/removal etc). This looks as if there has already been a decision to repair.
- 3) There is no information on the planned duration, or the potential timing of work.

Response from the Community Council, a statutory consultee

While access to the countryside has been shut down, thousands of people have lost their jobs and some now are starving in their homes ([see here](#)), while health workers, social care workers and bus drivers have been losing their lives because of a lack of Personal Protective Equipment, planning in the

Cairngorms National Park Authority goes on as normal.

Strangely enough, I believe that's ok. We need to keep the parts of our economy that won't spread the virus going. But that the CNPA is processing planning applications, while it's stopped its staff going outdoors to conduct wildlife surveys ([see here](#)), should tell us something about its priorities

Highlands and Islands Enterprise lodged its long anticipated planning application to repair the funicular in mid-March, just as the corona crisis was breaking, and this was activated by the CNPA just as the country went into lockdown ([see here for papers](#)). So far, there has not been a single public comment on the application. It quite possible HIE's timing was deliberate, an attempt to smuggle the application through while no-one was looking, though the Strathy as always, has tried to alert people to the application ([see here](#)). It's very important therefore that this application does not go through without critical scrutiny and I hope to run a series of short posts about it on Parkswatch over the next week.

It was good to see that the Aviemore and Glenmore Community Council in their response (above) highlighting the fact that the application pre-empts both the promised masterplan for Cairn Gorm and the outcome of the public consultation on this. Also that HIE appears to have already taken the decision to repair the funicular. This is corrupt. It further undermines the principles the Cairngorms National Park Authority adopted a year ago setting out how future developments at Cairn Gorm should be determined ([see here](#)).

The corona crisis, however, seems likely to force HIE to change their secret plans for Cairn Gorm in a way they never anticipated. Whatever the business case – and Parkswatch will come back to that – the conservative estimates of the costs to repair the funicular are around £10m. On top of that, there is the £2.5m costs of delivering the Ptarmigan upgrade ([see here](#)), which HIE and Natural Retreats judged essential to draw visitors to use the funicular. £12.5m is a huge percentage of HIE's budget. In the wake of the devastating economic impact that the corona crisis is causing across the Highlands, spending £12.5m to repair the funicular should not be on any politician's list of priorities.

The pockled consultation on the masterplan ([see here](#)), also now appears totally redundant. Whatever the responses – and they have not been made public – if you now asked those people again about what they thought should happen at Cairn Gorm, the responses would be different. The crisis is changing everything. Consequently, HIE should be told to set aside all its plans for Cairn Gorm (and indeed other political vanity projects like the A'Mhoine spaceport in Sutherland) and start working on a social and economic recovery plan for the Highlands as a whole.

Indeed, given what Highland politicians have been claiming about the dangers of the NHS being overrun, unless there is a massive new public investment programme, one would have thought their first priority needs to be what new investment is needed in the NHS and public health services, including in the Cairngorms National Park, rather than reverting to business as usual?

If HIE don't have the decency to withdraw their Planning Application to repair the funicular, the CNPA Board would have the courage to reject it on the basis that, whatever the business case for repairing the funicular, it makes no sense in the fall-out from the corona crisis.

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