

## Highland and Islands Enterprise's treatment of the Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust

### Description

The Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust Ltd was incorporated ([see here for information on companies house](#)) on 17 October 2017 for the expressed purpose of gaining ownership and control of the Cairngorm Mountain business. The Trust has Articles of Association that are fully compliant with the Land Reform Legislation and as such it is a body which has the legal competence to make an Asset Transfer request to Highland and Islands Enterprise as the owners of the Cairn Gorm Estate and the Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd hill business. The Trust has also met the criteria that requires a minimum of 10% of the local [Postcode District PH22] community to be members.

It has now been over 30 months since the Trust was legally incorporated and the membership might have expected some tangible progress to have been made by now.

On Friday 1 May, the Trust sent out the following to the members:

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We wish to seek your views on the future direction and policy of the Trust.

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The Trust was created for the development of mountain sport, educational and recreational facilities for the benefit of the community and the public. Mountain sport and recreation is a key part of the cultural identity of the communities in Badenoch and Strathspey. All of the aims and visions which we have promoted to date have involved projects on Cairngorm Mountain. They were all conceived as ways to make it a sustainable all year-round destination for the benefit of our local communities, business communities and visitors.

Cairngorm has played a major role in the social, economic and cultural development of the communities in Badenoch and Strathspey and we believe that the mountain will thrive if owned by the communities who have a vested interest in its success and we continue to work with HIE to develop a model for community ownership.

Mountain recreation resources often have complex operational challenges and competing interests. HIE are keen to ensure that any organisation involved in Cairngorm has the ability to manage complex resources. Whilst AGCT have presented a number of projects to HIE, where they are being taken forward, we have not been substantially involved in any of them. The suggestion from HIE is that AGCT undertake a project out with the ski area, which if successfully completed would provide the evidence HIE require.

Whilst projects away from Cairngorm mountain are within the Trust's purposes, we are conscious that many members joined because of their interest in Cairngorm. We are keen to hear our Members views on whether AGCT should move forward with such projects.

Specifically, we would like your views on whether you are in favour of a seasonal temporary under cover ice rink, similar to those found in other European communities in which mountain recreation is a key part of their cultural identity. This project would need to be self-sufficient and self-funded.

As these continue to uncertain times and social distancing looks likely to be in place for some time the target delivery date for this project would be for the winter 2021 – 2022.

### **Let us know your thoughts**

Please would you follow the link below and let has have your thoughts on whether AGCT should pursue projects out with the Cairngorm ski area. This is a short survey and should only take you a few minutes to complete.

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/NVC6S7H>

Stay safe and we hope to see you all soon.

Yours sincerely  
**AGCT Board**

The link lead to a then a brief questionnaire that asked if people would be in favour of AGCT pursuing projects out with the Cairn Gorm ski area and would people be in favour of a community owned seasonal ice rink. Comments could be made at the end.

This post will not analyse the prospects for a 'pop up' ice rink. The AGCT have provided no detail about costs, size, location, operational time-frame etc and it is therefore impossible for parkswatchscotland or indeed the Trust members to make any informed judgement.

The communication does make it very clearly obvious that the AGCT has made no tangible progress with respect to gaining ownership and control of the Cairngorm Mountain Business. It has taken them 30 months to understand that the significant effort that they've made to try and work with HIE has led nowhere. Suggesting a number of projects on the mountain and then having no substantial involvement "*in any of them*" will have been quite galling for the AGCT Directors who willingly gave their time. Given what is known about the manner in which HIE operates, that should not have come as any surprise. The AGCT Directors decided to follow a strategy of toadying up to HIE and they should now realise that their strategy has failed.

*"HIE are keen to ensure that any organisation involved in Cairngorm has the ability to manage complex resources"*. The hypocrisy in that statement simply beggars belief. HIE are fully responsible

for the present dysfunctional shambles at Cairn Gorm and they've demonstrated time after time that they do not have the ability to manage complex resources. We are left to wonder how they ever managed to hand the keys to Natural Retreats, given the requirements they are placing on the AGCT?

To be clear, there is nothing in the Community Empowerment legislation that requires a Community Trust to undertake a quite different commercial project as a pre-requirement for making a successful Asset Transfer Request. No other Community Trust, of which we are aware, has ever had to do such a thing.

HIE through this suggestion are effectively sidelining the AGCT for at least the next 2 years. The Trust Directors should understand by now that HIE are and have always been leading them a merry dance. They will never willingly transfer the Cairngorm business over to the local community. It's long past the time to face reality and tackle this head on.

The AGCT should now make an Asset Transfer request as quickly as possible. That should not take long to do given that they had a project manager in place for 8 months [he resigned in February for reasons unknown]. HIE will turn down that request but they will have to make public their reasons for refusal. The AGCT can then concentrate on addressing those reasons and make a second Asset Transfer request as soon as the legislation allows. If they go ahead with the proposed ice rink venture then that will just lead to a further 2 years being wasted. That's because HIE will turn down an Asset Transfer Request whenever it is made. Get it done now and waste no more time and energy on fruitless projects.

## **What needs to happen now**

The AGCT should consider the following suggestions which would assist with the furtherance of the original purpose for which the Trust was set up as well as improve its competence and credibility.

1. Forget all fanciful ideas for projects outwith Cairn Gorm. HIE cannot and should not be placing such a requirement on the AGCT. Make that clear to them.
2. Develop sub-groups to investigate and manage matters such as Fund Raising, Membership Drives and Communications
3. Replace the two Directors that have recently resigned and fully populate the vacant Directorships. The membership should be canvassed to find suitable and willing volunteers.
4. Increase the number of members from within the local Community to a level that cannot be ignored. A continuous membership drive is required.
5. Publicise the Trust and it's aims and ambitions. It is presently largely anonymous ([see FB page for example](#)). Publicity needs to be relentless and continuous
6. Raise funds. Nothing has been done since the initial crowd-funder. The Trust has no credibility while it does nothing to help itself.
7. Operate in a fully open, honest and transparent manner. Keep the membership fully informed about what the Trust is doing and publish the Board Meeting minutes.

*[Note: I was an interim Director of the AGCT from October 2017 to March 2018 and as a continuing member of the Trust I take a considerable interest in its affairs].*

## Category

1. Cairngorms

## Tags

1. Cairn Gorm
2. HIE
3. Local communities

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