

Cairn Gorm – HIE's negligence in Coire na Ciste

Description



The Ciste building in June 2020

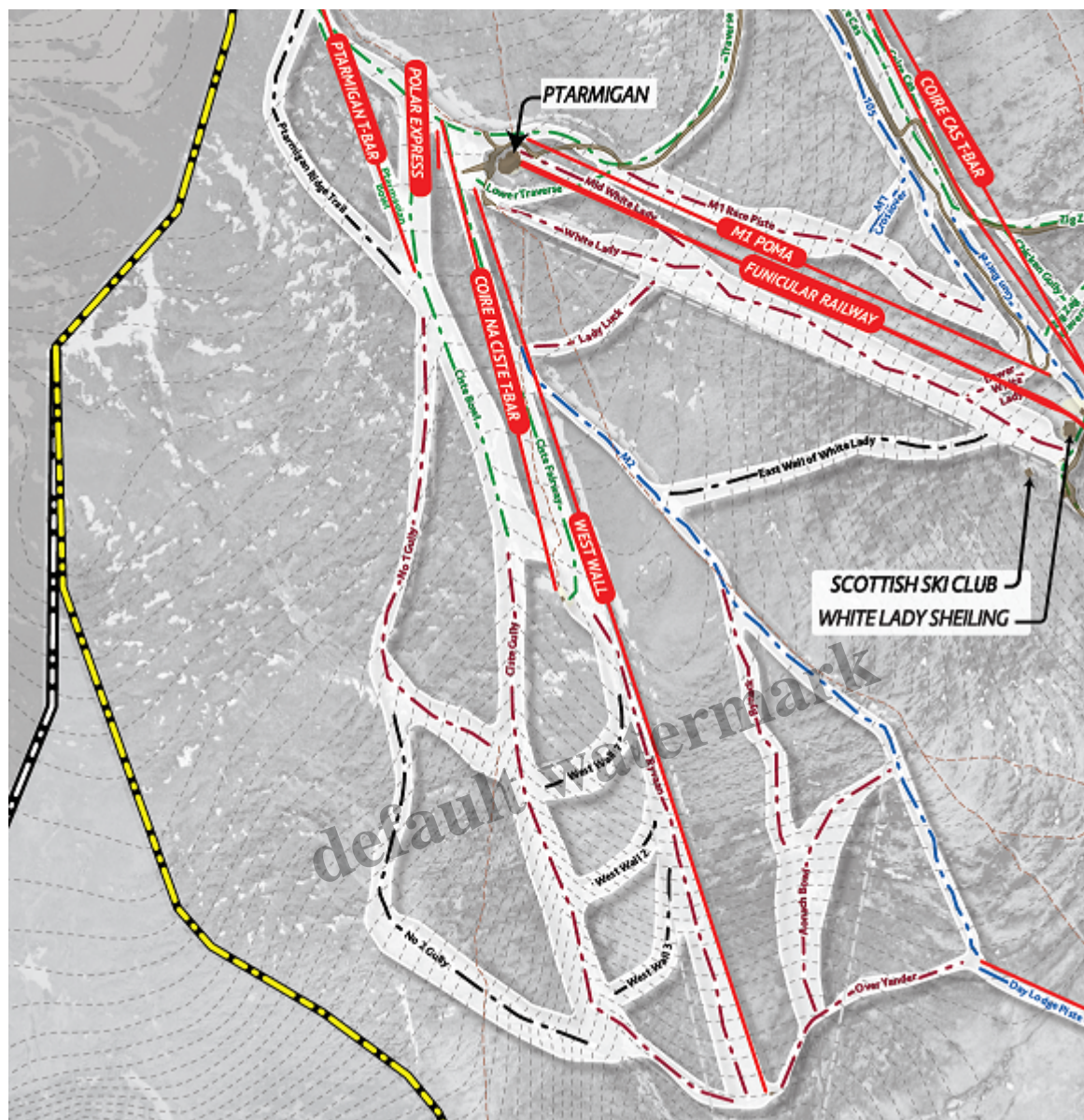
The Ciste building is a derelict eyesore and should be removed. Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) own the land and building and it is therefore their responsibility to take the necessary action.

Complete demolition and landscaping of the ground might seem like the most obvious and easiest answer but it isn't quite that simple. The building houses a substation from which the power is cabled to the West Wall (WW) Poma drive station.



This notice is on the front of the building and the Substation is live.

It seems then that the power from the internally housed substation will be required into the future unless or until HIE/Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd decide to either abandon the WW Poma or to cable the power to it from the Ptarmigan building at the top of the mountain. Power should be available from there because the WW Chairlift drive station was at the top of the chairlift and the power for it came down from the Ptarmigan building.



Lift map from SE Group report 2018 showing West Wall poma and Coire na Ciste t-bar. The Coire na Ciste chairlift used to connect the Ciste Building with the t-bars and pomas higher up.

The WW Poma could of course be drastically reduced in length with the loading area and drive station re-located at the same height as the the Ciste T-Bar loading area. Lift-served access to Coire na Ciste could then be abandoned completely and the Ciste building substation would no longer be required.....allowing full demolition of the Ciste building.

An alternative and more meritorious solution would be for an enterprising business or Community Trust to take over the area and develop a new business there.

What has HIE done to address the eyesore?

On 4 December 2013 a planning application was made to Highland Council for 'reconfiguration of

existing building to strip back to transformer area only and for re-cladding and re-roofing of enclosure. That application was 'called in' for determination by the Cairngorm National Park Authority, on 16 December 2014 and subsequently approved on 11 March 2014.

Nothing was then done before the planning consent lapsed 3 years later.

A re-application was submitted on 1 March 2017 and that was granted permission on 5 April 2017.

That planning consent has also lapsed with nothing having been done.

Planning applications come with associated costs. For example, on 26 October 2017, the agents acting for HIE informed them that the warrant fee for the demolition/rebuild would be £656 and that their fee for re-submission of the warrant and liaising with building control would be £995. The agents would also have charged an appropriate fee for producing the drawings for the rebuilt building. Additionally, labour costs would have been incurred by Cairngorm Mountain Ltd, HIE, Highland Council and CNPA. An expensive process which ended up with HIE informing their agents that they did not intend to take this forward at the present time.

Over a period which now exceeds 6 years, HIE have managed to do nothing except spend public money. It's a classic example of a gross waste of public funds because there has been no benefit at all from the expenditures incurred

HIE's response to alternative proposals

The Ciste Building and car park area is a publicly owned asset that is out of use, generates no income and provides no employment. The report produced by the SE Group in 2018 ruled out the reinstatement of uplift from the Ciste car park on the basis that the number of skier days, on any discrete day, was insufficient to support two separate entry points, to the hill. However, they didn't conduct any further analysis and their report was seriously flawed by omission.

There have been at least two enquiries made to HIE about the possibility of taking over/leasing the Ciste building/car park area with a view to establishing a business enterprise there. A number of ideas have been put forward for such as a café, micro lodge accommodation, campervan hook ups, an Environmental Education Centre and a Geo-Caching Centre as well as a Nordic/Backcountry Snowsports hub.

HIE, as the Government's Enterprise Agency in the Highlands were quick to kick these ideas into touch. The Cairn Gorm Estate is leased to CairnGorm Mountain [Scotland] Ltd, its wholly owned subsidiary, and it seems HIE will not consider a sub-lease to a third party. That's despite the fact that a precedent exists with a sub-lease to the Scottish Ski Club for their hut which sits adjacent to the bottom of the White Lady ski piste. HIE has also said that they would not consider any business proposal until after the so-called 'masterplan' has been produced.

It is quite extraordinary that the Enterprise Agency should turn away any proposal to develop this public asset when they have done nothing with it themselves over many years and the fact that they have no plans to develop it. The inescapable conclusion is they are incapable of developing this area themselves but they are afraid of any competition and are not therefore about to permit anyone else to do something positive with it.

The opportunity is now there for those who proposed to do something with this asset to get back to HIE and demand that they fully engage in meaningful discussions. HIE need to be forced to demonstrate that they are acting to address the criticism within the recent Audit Scotland Report in respect of their failure to engage with stakeholders ([see here](#)).

At a time when everything there is a great need to create new businesses and hence new jobs, the HIE standpoint must be robustly challenged and it cannot be allowed to stand. Badenoch and Strathspey has suffered enough from HIE's inertia and incompetence. The Scottish Snowsports industry has also been damaged by the continuing fiasco on Cairn Gorm. It is well past the time for HIE to be removed from all decisions about the future of Cairn Gorm Mountain, though they should still be required to pay the tab. Scotland, as a whole, deserves much better than this from those in positions of authority. The Scottish Government should show the strength of leadership required to make the hard decisions necessary to bring about real change so that benefits could then accrue.

In the meantime, the Graffiti Artists have occasionally been at work.

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Their efforts have

at least created some work for CMSL staff to do.....by painting out their drawings!



It could be said that the Graffiti is an improvement!

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. Cairn Gorm
2. CNPA
3. HIE
4. Scottish Government
5. skiing

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