

Cairngorm Mountain – further evidence of HIE’s unsustainable business strategy

Description

It's a well documented fact that the Cairngorm Mountain Business Strategy which has the Funicular Railway at its centre has been a demonstrable failure. The principle source of income has been the sale of tickets, summer and winter, to use the funicular. The number of passengers carried has never been anywhere near the forecast levels of 200,000 skier days and 165,000 tourist passengers each year. Furthermore, the evidence shows that the numbers actually carried have been falling, in recent years, while the number of tourists, coming to the Strathspey area, has been rising.

As a consequence, the mountain business has been chronically short of the funds required for survival, far less to maintain the assets. Highlands and Islands Enterprise intervened in 2008 when they took the business into public ownership to prevent its liquidation. The ongoing failure to maintain the assets then led HIE to providing their incoming tenant with £1.7m in 2014. According to the recently published Audit Scotland Report: HIE committed to investing £1.7m in the resort as part of the deal to transfer Cairngorm Mountain Ltd to Natural Assets Investment Ltd. The investment was intended to provide £0.9m to return infrastructure and equipment to a satisfactory condition and £0.8m for enhancements to the ski lifts.

That publicly provided funding would not have been required if maintenance had been kept up to date. The evidence shows, quite conclusively, that the income has never been close to sufficient to make the mountain business sustainable.

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Further Evidence

In March 2004, a planning application for Cairngorm Mountain was called-in by the National Park Authority. It related to: "Landscape Proposals for Cairngorm Mountain Carpark. Incorporating dry stone dyking, re-modelling slopes, revisiting drainage arrangements and Artworks. The proposal was to enhance the appearance of the perimeter of the upper Cas car park by the: "amelioration of the straight contours within the car park, the regular slopes of the upper and lower carparks being reshaped to less uniform angles by exaggerating the existing curves in the car park. There was also to be the addition of heather, juniper and blaе berries to replace the current semi-improved grassland of the banks which are untypical of the surrounding mountain environment.

The planning application was subsequently approved and the grant funded work was then completed, at considerable cost.

How does it look today?



The waterfall cascades.....overgrown, neglected and with carpark debris at the bottom.



A wall at the side of a path which leads to the top of the waterfalls. It's in an obvious state of collapse.



A stonebuilt stairway.....overgrowing and unkempt



Collapsed dyking adjacent to the stairway.



Coping stones have fallen off and the absence of any maintenance is clear as are the growing weeds.



Collapsing Dyking

It clear, from just a few pictures, that this is another area on Cairn Gorm that has and continues to be, completely unmaintained.

It's further evidence, if any is required, that this business has been very chronically short of funds over the period of the last 2 decades.

Conclusion

With the funicular centred business strategy having led to almost complete failure [in the real world, this business would long since have ceased to exist] then how will repairing the dysfunctional and inefficient funicular, that has been increasingly forsaken by customers, lead to a different outcome in the future?

What should happen now

1. The Scottish Government should intervene and remove HIE from all operational involvement at Cairn Gorm.
2. Forest and Land Scotland should take over control and be responsible for the operation of the business as well as the development of a sustainable business strategy.
3. HIE should pay the costs involved in resolving all the dilapidations which have occurred under their mismanagement.
4. Maintenance of the above 'enhancement' features could be added to the list of projects that are to be funded by mandatory parking charges.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

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