

Cairngorm Mountain – the consultation that isn't!

Description

Further to yesterday's critique of *Cairngorm Mountain – Towards a Vision and a Masterplan* ([see here](#)) this post takes a look at the process Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) is using to consult the public.

The consultation document ([see here](#)) is part a series of high level statements and part a wish list of potential developments; as such it can best be described as framework for a master plan. Its limitations are only too obvious. A future for the mountain with and without the funicular should have been contrasted and the implications of both options for new ski uplift should have been included and costed for public consideration. Having said that, the consultants who prepared the document engaged with a wide range of groups and individuals and they are to be commended for giving the exercise a fair stab, given the restricted remit given to them by HIE. and the process of this is the subject of this post.

HIE states that it is keen to find out people's views but is this really the case? The only way of responding offered by HIE is via an online Survey Monkey ([see here](#)) which is open to 31st August. Now Survey Monkeys have their place. They are good for organising the dates of meetings and eliciting simple, quick reactions to services rendered. When it comes to exploring people's views of more complex issues, they are only useful if spaces are provided for respondents to comment under each section where they score a particular issue. Remarkably only one such space is provided, in relation to respondents' views of what they consider to be – the most important strategy:

4. Ten potential Key Strategies were identified, underpinned by a series of support (see [18-28](#)).

Please rate on a scale of importance the following key strategies proposed.

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Important	Fairly important
01: An all year sustainable operating model	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
02: Scottish Centre for the Mountain Environment. A new centre that will replace the day lodge.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
03: A Mountain for all; Uplift; Modernise and rationalise; Facilities - Actively cater for all user groups; and, Activities - Diversify offering	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
04: Enhanced user experience: Sense of arrival; orientation; experiential design.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
05: Access from Ptarmigan: controlled access strategies for all to the mountain.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
06: Cohesive approach to ecology and habitat restoration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
07: De-carbonise the mountain - targeting net zero.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
08: Mountain Biking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
09: Promote active travel & sustainable transport	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10: Monitoring implementation of new activities - environmental and economic monitoring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. In your view, what is the single most important strategy presented in the Mas

All other questions are in same format as Question 4

Respondents are thus left with a simple tick box exercise by which to express their views of what are complex and controversial issues. On top of that, the questions presented for scoring are often either meaningless or simplified to a point where no one could answer them properly.

The first section asks respondents to score the "vision statements" made by a number of public, business and voluntary bodies.

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1. A series of stakeholders statements are presented within the Consultation document

Please identify if you agree or disagree with each of the vision statements as a vision of Cairngorm Mountain?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Cairngorm Mountain (Scotland) Ltd	<input type="radio"/>				
Cairngorms National Park Authority	<input type="radio"/>				
The Highland Council	<input type="radio"/>				
Scottish Natural Heritage	<input type="radio"/>				
Forestry and Land Scotland	<input type="radio"/>				
Cairngorm Business Partnership	<input type="radio"/>				
Macdonald Hotel and Resorts	<input type="radio"/>				
Cairngorms Campaign, Campaign For A Better Cairngorm, North East Mountain Trust, Ramblers Scotland, Scottish Wild Land Group	<input type="radio"/>				
Aviemore & Glenmore Community Trust	<input type="radio"/>				
RSPB Scotland	<input type="radio"/>				
Snowsport Scotland	<input type="radio"/>				
The Scottish Ski Club	<input type="radio"/>				
Mountaineering Scotland	<input type="radio"/>				
Highlands and Islands Enterprise	<input type="radio"/>				

Beyond the fact that it is unclear in the document whether these "stakeholder statements" describe what people see as the situation now on the mountain or what they would like to see in the future, it is difficult to argue with any of them. It's a case of "goodness is good" and little can be learned from their being scored. The same problem continues throughout the first part of the survey: high level statements with which few would disagree are presented for scoring.

Things become a bit more meaningful when it comes to the sections on current or potential activities on the mountain. The problem here is that people are being asked to simply tick boxes on a 'not important to very important' continuum in respect of issues which are complex and which demand in-depth or qualified responses. A couple of examples will suffice-

M04: Path Network: Maintain, Enhance and Improve

North East Mountain Trust has strong reservations about more paths high on the mountain but might well support new links between the base station and Glenmore.

08: Mountain Biking

The document is vague about what the Mountain Bike strategy would mean on the ground. North East Mountain Trust would be very concerned about any developments which could be seen as encouraging people to take bikes onto the plateau but might have less reservations about facilities lower on the hill.

A Survey Monkey without spaces to comment renders it impossible for respondents to simply tick a box.

Come on HIE! Do you want to know people's views and then spend time analysing these to get a real flavour of what might be possible and desirable for the future of Cairn Gorm or do you simply want to be able to tell the Minister that everyone is happy with what is proposed?

What should happen now

North East Mountain Trust has completed the Survey Monkey (reluctantly). We have also submitted written comments to the consultants and have copied these to HIE charlotte.wright@hient.co.uk (the Chief Executive) and to the Cairngorms National Park Authority planning@cairngorms.co.uk. We urge those with concerns to do the same before the current deadline for the Survey Monkey at the end of August. The Consultants to submit comments to are Threesixty Architecture INFO@360ARCHITECTURE.COM and Jura Consultants paul@jura-consultants.co.uk. We also call on HIE to email all interested parties and advise them that written comments are welcome. The deadline for comments should be extended to mid-September to allow for this.

[Written on behalf of the North East Mountain Trust SCIO 008783]

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

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