

Cairn Gorm – the construction site at the heart of the National Park (1)

Description



The Coire na Ciste car park where the Cairngorms National Park Authority granted planning permission for a campervan site in June. The construction compound for the funicular can be seen on the right. Photo credit George Paton

There have been a number of significant developments over the last couple of months that relate to Cairn Gorm that have not, as yet, been covered by parkswatch. The Scottish Minister responsible for the disastrous decision to fork out £32.42 million over the next five years on repairing the funicular ([see here](#)) and who committed up to £73.09 million in subsidy over the next 30 years ([see here](#)), Fergus Ewing, was put out to grass following the elections to the Scottish Parliament. The Chief Executive of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Charlotte Wright, the person ultimately responsible for the disastrous outsourcing of Cairngorm Mountain to Natural Retreats and numerous health and safety failures at Cairn Gorm over the last six years, including the funicular, has announced that she will quit this summer ([see here](#)). HIE has finally produced a masterplan for Cairn Gorm ([see here](#)), which parkswatch will consider in a further post.

Meantime, Cairn Gorm has been turned into one large building site. This post will take a look at the tube slides being constructed on the eastern half of the lower Coire Cas car park. It will be followed by a post that considers the repairs to the funicular.



The western half of the lower Coire Cas car park is being used as a compound for the funicular repair.
Photo Credit George Paton.

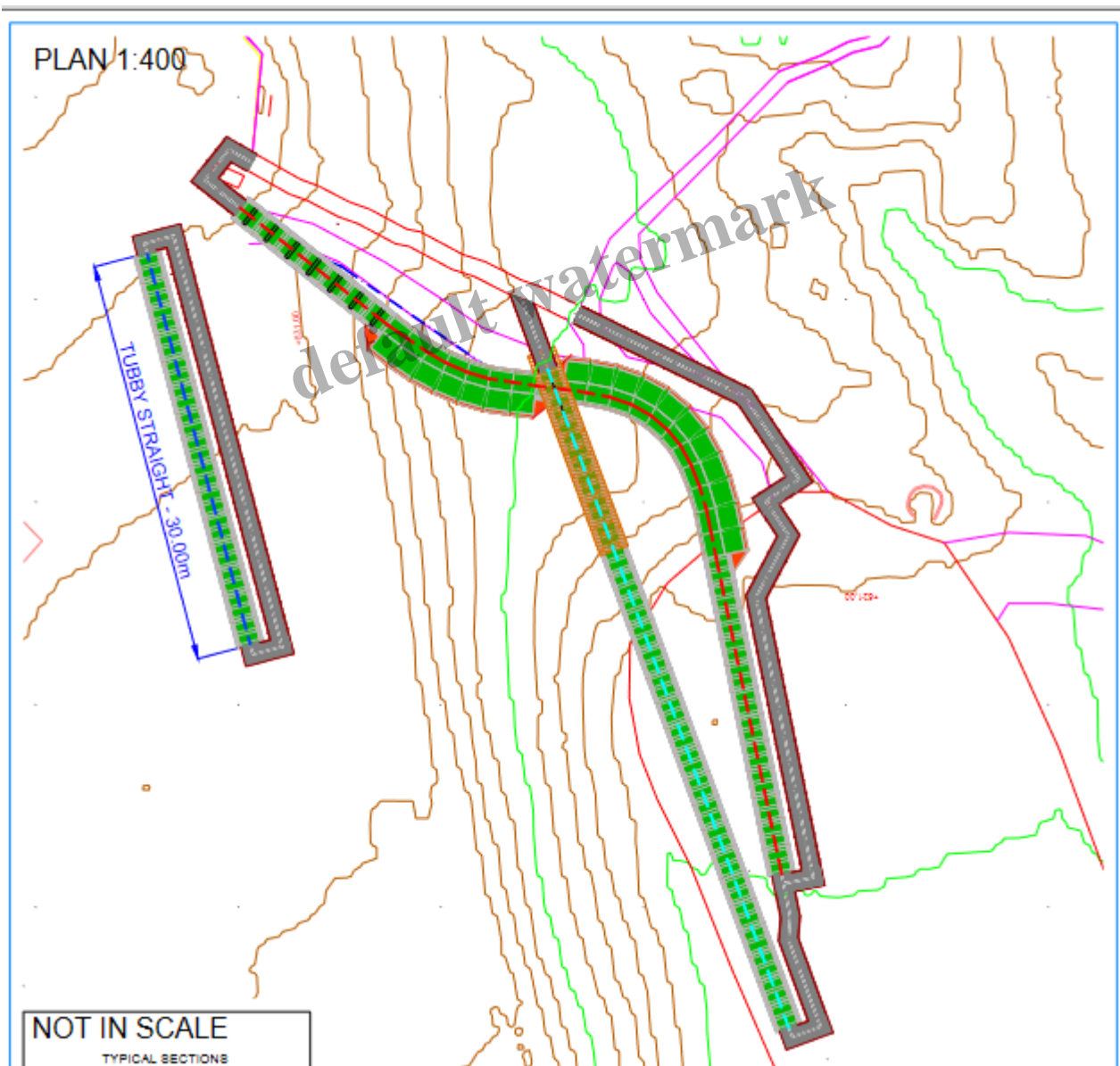
The tube slide construction area



Tube slide construction works. Photo credit Ayrshire Lad.

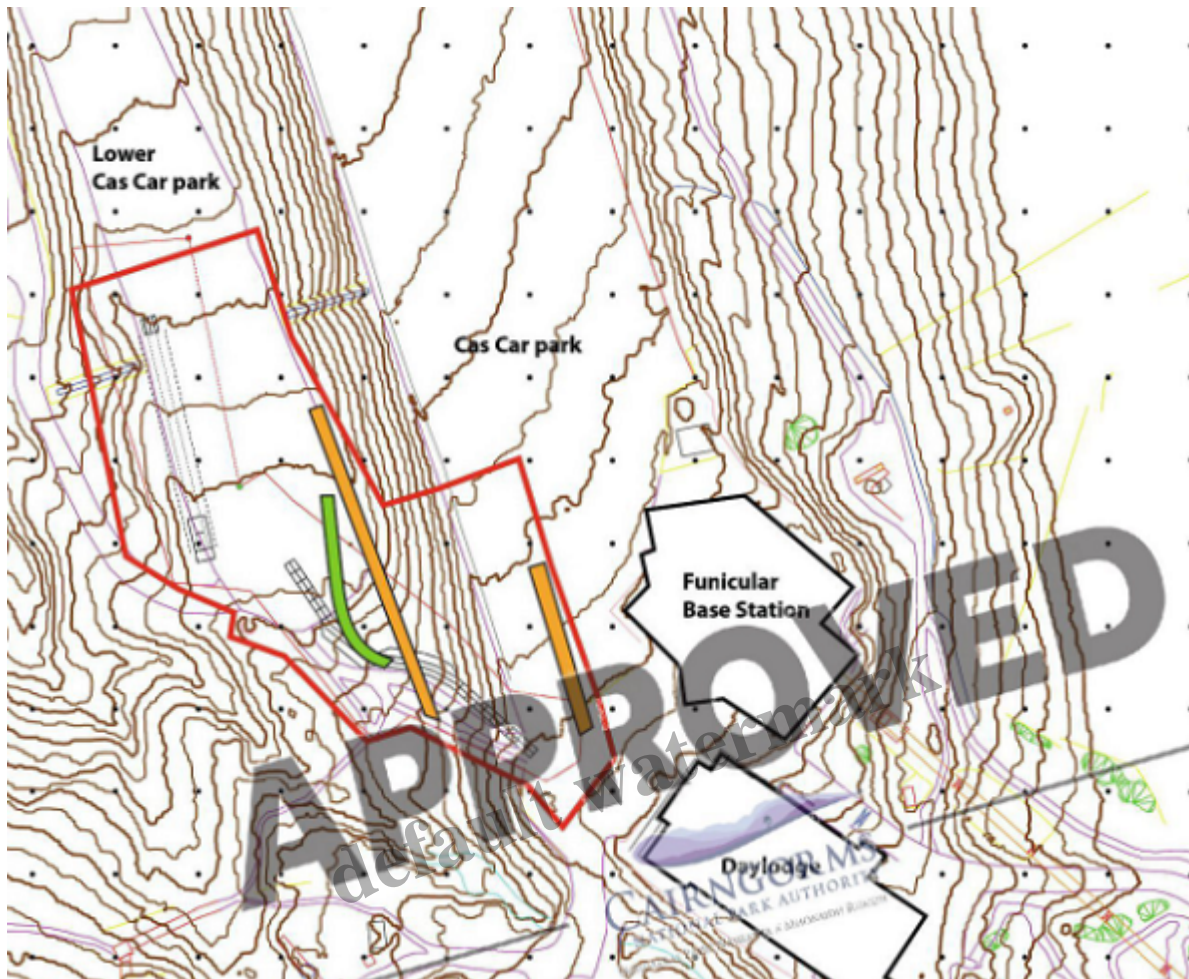
In June 2020 the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) granted temporary planning permission – for the period up until November 2021 – to Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd (CMSL) to install further tube slides at the edge of the Coire Cas car park. This was subject to conditions, including a revised layout plan. Despite being closed to the public for much of the last year, CMSL only submitted information at the end of May (see [here](#) for planning papers). At best the tube slides will only run for three months before the planning permission expires. Part of Parkswatch’s prediction that they might never pay for themselves, but certainly not in the period covered by the planning permission ([see here](#)) has been proved correct. So much for the CNPA’s statutory duty to promote sustainable development.

The original planning documents submitted by CMSL were sketchy to say the least and contained contradictory information:



Extract of “preliminary drawings” presented to the Planning Committee in June 2020 – without a key. This plan implied that the new long straight slide would end at the bridge

over the curving slide.



The yellow lines represent two new tube slides, the green a modification to an existing slide. This plan indicates the long straight slide will extend well past the new bridge over the curving slide. Both plans were presented to the Planning Committee!

The unclear and contradictory plans for the tube slides make it very difficult for any member of the public or Board Member to assess the true impact of the tube slides at the time of the application. Moreover, none of the new documents uploaded to the Planning Portal in May and June contain final plans showing where the tube slides will be located and relating to the various drawings that have now been submitted, making it very difficult to comment on what is happening on the ground. This is not what we should expect from a National Park Authority.

The top photo shows, however, that the landscape impact is going to be significant. There is nothing I can find on the planning portal to show how the rubble slope by the bridge will be landscaped, if at all, but it seems likely from what was said in Committee Report last year that a “3.3 metre tall wooden structure, ending in the lower car park” is to be built from the bridge. In other words a large new artificial structure is to be imposed on the landscape.

It is hard to see how this extensive work fits with HIE/CMSL's claims in the planning documents that *"the 'Neverplast Tubby' model of slide is an integrated system which is easily removed and reassembled . The surface of the slides would comprise Neverplast rubber matting which offers an all year round surface that is not affected by the weather. The slides and conveyor would sit on the surface of the ground, however, they would be pinned into position and metal supports would also be used on the banked corners"*

Or, this statement which differs again from the two statements above:

"The slides are 2 metres wide and are constructed predominantly to follow the natural contours of the site which slopes down towards the north and west, although some changes of up to 1 metre, above or below existing ground level, are proposed in works related to the extension of the existing slide."



Further works in the lower Coire Cas car park. Photo Credit Ayrshire Lad

The construction works on the edge of the lower Coire Cas car park appear also related to the tube slides. If I am correct about this, it appears that NEITHER of the plans presented to Committee are correct. In the plan marked "Approved", the tube slide has been moved from the upper car park, while the other plan is complete. The failure by the CNPA to require clear and accurate plans has simply

opened the door to HIE/CMSL to do what they want – mix and match!

What is clear from the photo is that works of this scale will not easily be removed. Once the temporary works are completed, HIE will submit a further planning application aimed at making the development permanent. A further step towards turning Cairn Gorm into a third rate theme park. Having allowed HIE to get this far, the CNPA planning staff are likely to have little option but to agree to extend the planning permission otherwise they will risk being accused of allowing public money to be wasted on a pointless exercise.

We can only hope that CNPA Board Members, some of whom at the June Planning Committee opposed the recommendation of officers to create a campervan park in Coire na Ciste on the basis that such a facility should be lower down, will make the same arguments about the tube slides whose impact appears likely to be far greater.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

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