

The potential for a local community take-over of Cairn Gorm from Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Description



Slip sliding wahey!

Celebrating the achievement at the rink are Janis Bootle, Iain Miller, Duncan Swarbrick, Lee Bissett, Amanda Clinton, Kirsty Bruce, Mike Gale and Mike Dearman.

By Gavin Musgrove
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PROJECT leaders have hailed the 'enormous' community effort in making the return of ice to Aviemore a reality after an absence of two decades.

The finishing touches – and last coverings of ice – are currently being applied to the new seasonal skating rink, ahead of it opening to the public from Saturday.

Over the past three weeks more than 40 volunteers from across the strath have contributed to erecting the marquee, constructing the floor base and electrical works to ensure the October half-term target is met.

Duncan Swarbrick, chairman of the Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust (AGCT) which has led the project, said: "An ice rink is returning to Aviemore after 20 years thanks to an enormous community effort.

"Everyone connected to the project could not be happier.

"Our communities here have a strong cultural and historic connection with wintersports and ice skating.

"We have bought the rink, the large marquee in which it stands and – except for the refrigeration plant – all the equipment.

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An ice rink is returning to Aviemore after 20 years thanks to an enormous community effort. Everyone connected to the project could not be happier.

Duncan Swarbrick

"That said, I think it is the involvement of so many people, from fundraising events to putting up the marquee and building the rink, which makes it owned by the community.

"Over the last three weeks it has been great to see so many people coming to help or just turning up to show their support. We are currently making ice and plan to open for business from this Saturday."

The trust operators plan to allocate a number of spaces in every session for residents from across Badenoch and Strathspey to access the rink at a significantly discounted price of £7.50 for adults and £5 per child.

The rink, with real ice, measures 20 metres by 12 metres and has been installed at the Macdonald Aviemore Resort almost on top of the site of the old facility.

It was controversially demolished in 1999 using public money and with no guarantees of a replacement.

Mr Swarbrick said: "It has been great to see volunteers help who previously worked at the old ice rink.

"We are delighted that Amanda Clinton has joined as a general manager to take charge of running the ice rink and we hope to create up to nine jobs to be paid at the Living Wage."

The resort is allowing the trust to occupy the site initially for seven months free of charge, which will cover the first full season of operation.

Over £110,000 has been raised of which more than £60,000 has come from community, business donations and fundraising events.

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Article from the the Strathy 7th October 2021

The Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust (AGCT) was formed in October 2017 *“to seek community ownership of the Cairngorm Ski Area and Infrastructure, in order to ensure that it is more effectively managed for mountain visitors, employees, and the local and wider community”*.

That purpose was recorded at the end of the minutes of their first AGM, almost three years ago in November 2018:

Mike Gale closed the meeting by thanking members for attending the meeting and reiterating that AGCT’s goal was a future successful ski area at Cairngorm Mountain”

It is still reflected in the banner headline on the AGCT website:



<http://www.aviemoreglenmoretrust.org/>

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)’s response to the creation of the Trust and the potential takeover of their property at Cairngorm was first, in 2019, to offer the AGCT grant money to employ staff ([see here](#)) but then to ward off their attentions from Cairn Gorm. Parkswatch contributors thought the AGCT had made a major mistake when, at HIE’s instigation, they decided in 2020 to take on a totally different project, an ice rink in Aviemore ([see here](#)). We thought this would embroil the AGCT in a project they could never deliver and divert their attentions from the key issue, the future of downhill skiing at Cairn Gorm.

I am happy to admit that we were wrong on the first part. Eighteen months ago the AGCT had almost

no cash

AVIEMORE AND GLENMORE COMMUNITY TRUST

Income Statement
For The Year Ended 31st October 2020

	2020 £	2019 £
Turnover	25,164	16,552
Staff costs	(19,849)	(12,357)
Depreciation and other amounts written off assets	(402)	-
Other charges	(7,196)	(1,420)
Taxation	-	-
(Deficit)/surplus	<u><u>(2,283)</u></u>	<u><u>2,775</u></u>

but since then it has raised £110,000, of which over £60,000 has come from the community and local business donations.

It has secured a site, free of charge for seven months, and planning permission ([see here](#)) for the rink, near the site of the old rink which was demolished and where permission had been granted to build a new rink twenty years ago:

98/00078/FULBS	Re-development of Aviemore Mountain Resort (formerly Aviemore Centre) including detailed proposals for the erection of a new swimming pool, ice and sports facilities etc.	6 July 1999	PERMISSION GRANTED
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But perhaps most important of all has been the way the project has engaged and invigorated the local community (see the excellent facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/AviemoreCommunityIce/>).

There is a long way to go of course. The AGCT hopes to create nine jobs paying the Scottish Living Wage (not a lot but higher than many of the low paid tourist jobs in the Cairngorms National Park) but for that they need the general public to use the rink. If that does succeed this winter, there will be a number of challenges, which include:

- finding/negotiating a more permanent site and one that is affordable, the risk being that if the rink becomes successful MacDonald Resorts or other potential landowners will hike the rent. That might put community land-ownership back onto AGCT's agenda.
- making the ice rink sustainable in terms of energy use (I think it was right the Cairngorms National Park Authority has contributed £25k but from the Green Recovery Fund?).
- and whether the AGCT can develop the capacity to turn its attentions back to Cairn Gorm.

While the ice-rink project has clearly diverted AGCT from Cairn Gorm for the last couple of years, in

retrospect that is not necessarily a bad thing. I very much doubt they could have persuaded HIE to change any of the disastrous decisions it has taken in that time or that HIE would have allowed them to take on any of the business up there. What everyone should now be able to see, from members of the local community to national politicians like Kate Forbes, MSP, is that the AGCT would have made a much better job than HIE of operating the “side attractions” at Cairn Gorm, like the campervan park in Coire na Ciste ([see here](#)).

The risk now is that HIE tries to co-opt the AGCT to help run the Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd without giving it any power. I hope the AGCT resists that, maintains its independence and, as I have suggested, makes a bid to takeover Coire na Ciste, since HIE has decided to end skiing there. They would be well advised, however, to leave HIE to manage the disaster of the funicular in Coire Cas and wait for national politicians to decide to sort out that mess.

Category

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Date Created

October 9, 2021

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