

HIE's campervan park at Cairn Gorm – an abject business failure

Description

The campervan park within the Coire na Ciste car park on Cairn Gorm [\(see here\)](#) and [\(here\)](#) will close for the season this coming weekend.

Commercial failure or success?

Data gathered from observations carried out each evening over two separate 1-week periods provides the evidence that the Ciste campervan park has been avoided by campervan users who now park elsewhere on Cairn Gorm.



The Ciste campervan park with just two users. That was the average number per evening over a

period of 14 evenings.

Campervan users are avoiding the Ciste facility and parking in the Coire Cas car park and on the down road instead:



Campervans in the Coire Cas carpark



Campervans parked adjacent to the 'down' road

The Statistical Evidence

During 2019 and 2020, studies were made to gain an insight into the usage of the Ciste and Cas car parks by campervans. Observations were made during the weeks ending 6 July and 27 August 2019 and also during the weeks ending 20th and 27th July 2020. It was found that the overwhelming majority of Campervan users chose at that time to park in the Coire na Ciste car park. A total of 376 campervans were observed to be parked up overnight in the Ciste car park over the weeks observed, while just 63 were in the Cas car park during the same time periods. That equated to 86% in the Ciste and 14% in the Cas.

Following the opening of the Ciste campervan park on 6 September, observations were made over 14 evenings during the weeks ending 16 September and 3 October 2021. During that period a total of 28 campervans were recorded as parked up overnight in the Ciste campervan park, while 172 were parked up in the Cas car park and at the side of the down road. That equated to 14% in the Ciste

campervan park and 86% in the Cas car park and down road.

Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd [CMSL] made a belated attempt to increase usage by reducing the cost of an overnight stay from £15 to £10, Monday to Friday, and increasing the time period when campervanners could access the site ([see here](#)). Further observations were made each evening from Monday 11th to Friday 15th October to determine the success or failure of this price reduction.

During this time period 36 campervans were observed to be parking in the Cas car park and at the side of the down road while there were just 7 in the Ciste car park. That equated to 84% and 16 % respectively. There was therefore a very slight increase in the proportion parking in the Ciste campervan park after the changes. However, that meant that just a single extra campervan, 7 as opposed to 6, had chosen to park there by compared to before the price reduction. Those 6 would have paid £90 in total whereas the 7 who did park there would have paid in a total of just £70. The price reduction, therefore, has not turned the facility around. That alone ought to inform CMSL that their campervan park will not succeed unless it is radically improved and offers the sort of services that attract users.

The cost of developing this facility, such as it is, has recently been revealed by an FOI request to be £64,755.82, although that cost doesn't include the materials and labour used to build the fence that goes all the way round it. That's a bit more than the circa £60k that the interim CEO said it cost.

The capital used to develop the Ciste campervan park has achieved nothing other than an exact reversal of where campervan users now park up overnight. The use of the Ciste campervan park, in its present format, has been soundly rejected by users to the point that the residual car parking area has seen more use.



5 Campervans parked up in the free car parking area adjacent to the pay to stay Campervan Park

The 28 campervans observed to be parked up in the Ciste campervan park over 14 nights would have generated just £420 of income. At that rate of occupancy, averaging two per night, and with the campervan park open for about 6 months of the year, it will take over 12 years for the income to equal the Capital Expenditure HIE has incurred to develop it. Of course, there are other costs to consider such as the removal of the wastewater and the contents of the bins, not to mention the booking system which is already down for upgrading.

If this was a private commercial enterprise then it would already be in financial distress. However, and very regrettably, this is a publicly owned business that is heavily subsidised by public funds. The entire cost of this campervan park will have been met by Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Improvements

Campervan users require to be incentivised into staying in the Ciste campervan park. It is abundantly clear that paying 10 or 15 quid for a toilet emptying facility and access to some bins and fresh water doesn't provide any incentive to stay there.

When something fails as badly as this, a major rethink is necessary. Any normal business would ask campervan users what services they would expect to find in what is a new facility, but HIE and CMSL

are not like that which is why a radical change in strategic direction is needed.

What needs to happen now

1. An enquiry needs to be convened and HIE's involvement on Cairn Gorm together with the significant sums of public money squandered should be transparently investigated.
2. HIE needs to cease obsessing over the funicular railway and discard their blinkered view of the mountain business. Their strategy of focusing on the funicular, with all facets of the business designed to boost the numbers in Coire Cas and hence the numbers using the funicular, was a major failure prior to the funicular breakdown. And it will fail again after over £20m of public funds has been squandered on the repair work ([see here](#)).
3. A full redevelopment of the Ciste base station building to include toilets, showers and a café bar needs to be planned and implemented. The people who have the commitment as well as the knowledge and skills to bring this about opened a Community owned, seasonal Ice Rink in Aviemore on Saturday 9 October ([see here](#)). It has already proved to be an outstanding success in direct contrast to CMSL's campervan park. The Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust should be immediately invited to take over the Ciste side of the hill and provided with the funds to re-develop it. The same funding as has recently been provided by HIE to Nevis Range would be a good start: £800k
4. Hook up points for campervans need to be provided.
5. Lodge and Micro Lodge accommodation should be constructed to provide the scale necessary to make a Ciste based business commercially self-sustaining.
6. Those responsible for this farcical debacle should consider their continued involvement in anything to do with Cairn Gorm.

Category

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