

Fergus Ewing MSP is in denial about HIE's mismanagement at Cairn Gorm

Description

Comments made to the Strathgy on 23rd January by the local MSP Fergus Ewing suggest he was unaware of the “toxic culture” at Cairn Gorm ([see here](#)) and is still in denial about the funicular:

Ewing (SNP) said: “I hope the new executive, like Ms Smith, is devoted to the task of making Cairngorm Mountain successful.”

“The existing team are excellent and know the hill better than anyone and perhaps one of them can make the step-up.”

“Much of the criticism directed towards the hill and in particular the funicular is in my view unwarranted and also unfair to the people who work there.”

“So the new leader should also be a robust defender of the good work they have done and will continue to do.”

“We can and will succeed when the funicular is back in use. No critic ever mentions that the work to repair it must be carried out in the most difficult construction site in the UK with sub arctic weather.”

“I wish the new leader well.”

Mike Dearman is a director of the Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust but was speaking to the Strathgy in a personal capacity.

He said: “Unfortunately I no longer believe that any new CEO, however, keen they may be, can effect the scale of transformation that is necessary to turn the business around under HIE's ownership.”

“HIE does many things well but it is simply not equipped to this task, the business model has failed time, and time again.”

TURN TO PAGE 3

Compare and contrast the views expressed by Mr Ewing and Mr Dearman in the Strathgy 23rd January

“Much of the criticism directed towards the hill and in particular the funicular is in my view unwarranted and also unfair to the people who work there”.

How is the criticism unwarranted? We have a funicular that has been closed for almost six years, was supposed to be open for the start of the ski season and still has no re-opening date.

WhiteLady 2025-02-03 10:59:42



People working at the passing loop of the funicular on Monday, a day of high winds. Photo CM(S)L webcam.

“No critic ever mentions... difficult construction site.....sub arctic weather”.

Part of the reason the funicular is a difficult construction because of its fundamental design flaws – concrete should never have been used – but that has been made worse by some terrible management decisions. The scaffolding at the passing loop was removed just before Xmas amid false claims from HIE about the impact of “bad weather” ([see here](#)) but despite the repairs not having been completed – as demonstrated by the photo above. That has made continued repair work more difficult and increased the health and safety risks to the workforce.

Perhaps Mr Ewing should pay closer attention to Parkswatch before commenting? Having learned to ski at Cairn Gorm in 1964 and having worked there as well I know exactly what the weather can do!

“The existing team are excellent and know the hill better than anyone”

If that is so why is Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and their management not listening to them?

A good example is the c £1,000,000 of snow making equipment which was supplied at public expense through HIE. Most of this has been standing idle over the last month or so while snow making was a distinct possibility:

CottamsWay 2025-01-27 14:43:54



Four snow cannon visible in the picture above – spot the fourth! – none working. Photo credit CM(S

HIE fail to understand that they need to make snow when its cold enough to do so – are staff not telling them that loudly enough or is it easier just not to make snow?

SunKid 2025-01-27 14:42:33



Same day, two snow cannon not working above the sunkid rope tow, installed to create a new beginners area. Photo credit CM(S)L webcam

HIE also fails to understand that having or maintaining a machine made base means all natural snow that falls accumulates instead of melting into the ground. There have been other days, such as 3rd February, when none of the six snow cannon featured in the above two photos have been working despite conditions being cold enough to do so.

SunKid 2025-01-23 11:53:08



Photo credit courtesy CM(S)L webcam

The patches in this photo had survived the thaw since the last time I had seen CM(S)L use the snow cannon on 10/01/2025:

SunKid 2025-01-10 20:13:27



The spray from the cannons can be clearly seen although it would appear not all of the cannons in the 1st picture were operative. Photo courtesy CM(S)L webcam

The three patches that were visible on 23/01/2025 clearly owe their survival to the use of snow cannon and were later covered by the natural snow in the photos above.

By 4th February HIE had lost the top half of the beginner slope above the Day Lodge. Much of the natural snowfall that afternoon / night will have been lost to the mud. If CM(S)L have no snow on the beginner area, they have no income at all. Nor do the instructors have any work.



Note the diesel generator, presumably on hire, next to the two snow cannon but not being used. Photo courtesy CM(S)L's webcams.

Another example of HIE spending money on equipment but then saving money by not using it!

On 27th January, in their article on the toxic culture at Cairngorm Mountain, The Times also reported ([see here](#)):

"However, when the warmer weather hit this month, the snow that had appeared weeks earlier melted almost overnight. The only slopes useable for skiing and snowboarding were in the beginners' area, where the snow is made by a machine."

They appear to have been fed this misleading information from HIE/CM(S)L. The pictures of manufactured snow show just how effective snow cannon can be when positioned and used in the right places. Compare this claim from 31st January:

News from the Slopes

Friday 31st January – 8.30 am Morning all. Light winds and cold temperatures, overcast at present, but bright spots. Park T Bar in operation along with the Conveyors, Sunkid Platter Lift, Coire Cas T Bar and M1 Poma. Some areas of the hill are generally a lot of good snowsports to be had. We will have the Ptarmigan restaurant and toilets open later this morning. Things! Other areas of the hill, will be assessed during the day. Cheers Ops 1
with this photo from the Sunkid webcam less than two hours later:



Note the lines of poles indicating the skiing boundaries. Photo credit CM(S)L webcams.

Why aren't the snow cannons working to increase availability, depth and longevity of the natural snow conditions? The Times also reported:

“Hurst [the interim CEO] is clear this [snowmaking] is only a short-term solution. He says it becomes “uneconomical” to use the snow factory, which was part of a £1 million investment, as temperatures rise.”

Mr Hurst seems to be implying that the purchase of a snow factory by HIE was a poorly thought out waste of public money! No consideration to the fact that it was possibly placed in the wrong area, the lowest and therefore warmest part of the mountain. This was something that CM(S)L appeared to be trying to rectify by their planning application to move the snow factory uphill, approved but not yet actioned and then defeated by placing the magic carpets in the way!

Techno Alpin, the snow factory manufacturer, paint a completely different picture on their website:-

SNOW AT WARM TEMPERATURES

SNOWFACTORY - GUARANTEEING A SECURE START TO THE SEASON

Get your winter season off to a secure start - this is possible only with the SnowFactory. This snowmaking system not only allows you to plan more reliably throughout the winter months, but also guarantees a secure start to the season. The SnowFactory is an innovative snowmaking technology producing top-quality snow regardless of air temperature. The SnowFactory is not intended to replace conventional snowmaking systems, but rather to complement them. With their help, snow can be produced 24/7, regardless of the outdoor conditions at the site.

Maybe someone should explain to Mr Hurst, who is a skier, exactly how snow production works. If no one at CM(S)L can help then maybe he should speak to Wolfgang Hanni, European sales director for Techno Alpin. Mr Hurst continued:

"In the future, if the situation of low snow and limited capacity arises again, we will use the same system to cover the busy holiday periods, but as we cannot predict the weather can provide no assurance beyond that," he said (The Times).

The implication from Mr Hurst's statement is that in the event of no natural snow the snow factory, again no mention of the 13 snow cannon, will only be used for holiday periods, 2-3 weeks at Xmas, half term and Easter!

How will that help to make CM(S)L a viable business?

How many staff will keep their jobs?

How are any of the local ski schools going to survive if this is the case?

How will ski hire businesses survive?

Has anyone actually got any kind of idea or plan as to how this business is going to progress or are we watching the dying days of what was once the U.K's No1 ski resort? If staff really are as excellent as Mr Ewing believes, why isn't he helping them speak out about the management on Cairn Gorm?

Every public statement from HIE or CM(S)L raises more questions than are answered and HIE has still not said whether people who bought season passes will be compensated if the funicular does not re-open:

“There have been rumblings about refund requests for winter sport season passes if the funicular does not reopen before the spring. When operating, the rail line can provide easy access to better ski terrain, avoiding a potentially draining walk.

Cairngorm Mountain said the “snow sports season usually runs into April and we are awaiting a further update from our parent company HIE which we expect very soon, to provide an estimated date for the return of the funicular”. (The Times).

Another question for Mr Ewing, does he believe people who bought season ski passes after being told the funicular should be re-opened by Xmas should be receive a refund?

Mr Mike Dearman appears to have a far more accurate grasp of the situation at Cairn Gorm than Mr Ewing and should be congratulated for standing up to him and being prepared to criticise HIE’s mismanagement. There are others in Strathspey who should now starting to realise that they need to join the whistleblowers and speak out against this continual stream of misinformation from HIE before the snowsports area is lost altogether..

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. Cairn Gorm
2. funicular
3. Governance
4. HIE
5. snowsports

Date Created

February 7, 2025

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