

Cairngorm railway firmly back on track



MIKE GIFFORD: Took up his new role a month ago at mountain resort.

New resort boss says Health and Safety Executive were full of praise after inspection of attraction recently and visitor numbers are now stacking up

THE new boss of Cairngorm Mountain has said good strides are being made with the underlying priority of the resort - to turn it into a year-round destination.

The Cairngorm adventure playground fully opened this past week with the eye-catching additions of the CAIRNGORM letters which double up as play equipment.

The go-kart section has also been extended and now covers around four kilometres whilst Mr Gifford is keen to improve on the mountain bike offering and the resort's events calendar.

New CEO Mike Gifford said: "I had my kids up the previous weekend to have a look around as I thought it would be a good test of how we are doing as a family orientated resort and they were entertained for hours on end."

"I think we now have an all-year package and that's what we want to continue with."

There are plans for a de-mountable toboggan track to be installed next summer but this project remains at an early stage.

Mr Gifford said: "We want Cairngorm to be the best mountain resort in the UK. I think we are very close but there is more that we can do."

One big boon has been the return of the funicular to operation after its prolonged absence on safety grounds.

He revealed: "Over the past six weeks we have had around 10,000



CAIRNGORM FUNICULAR: More than 10,000 passengers since latest return.

people travel on it which is amazing."

Mr Gifford also said there had been a really success Health and Safety Executive inspection earlier this month.

"They basically said the system is exemplary and the team are doing a really good job on it so I do not envisage any problems at all going forward..."

"All we are doing is focusing on the future."

Skiing remains essential to the future and of course that will be greatly enhanced by the return of the mountain railway which provides easy access to the more snow-sure upper slopes of the Ptarmigan bowl.

Mr Gifford said: "We had 97 skier

days last winter with the snow patch (by the Day Lodge) so that shows our commitment even though we did not have as much snow as we would have wished on the mountain..."

"Our intention is to open as much of the ski area as possible when conditions allow."

As part of that the servicing of the

Cairngorm funicular will be brought forward so once the snow arrives in sufficient quantity the resort can open.

Mr Gifford said: "We are going to be reactive - we want to maximize mountain sports and open as much as we can."

A new opportunity for a major change will present itself at the end of the year when the 25-year obligation period for the European Regional Development Funding expires on December 24.

It means that financial penalties will no longer be in place for the removal of the controversial closed system.

Mr Gifford said: "It is something we need to look at - I have had a look over the agreement but whatever we do we need to do sympathetically."

There has been a lot of regeneration of the ecosystem, however, we are about access and activities so we will see what we can do."

He also believes that the time has come to review owners Highlands and Islands Enterprise's 25-year masterplan with most of the phase one objectives now being completed. For now the immediate focus is on coming few months.

Read more about the new boss at the Cairngorm Mountain resort by visiting the Strathly online at www.strathspye-herald.co.uk



(1

wrote most of this on way to Alps a week ago and only got decent internet a week later. Apologies if it is now out of date or been overtaken by events but hope it is still worth saying).

One would hardly expect the new Chief Executive of Cairngorm Mountain (Scotland) Ltd, Mike Gifford, to say anything negative about the "resort" in his first interview with the press, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) would never have appointed someone who might. But several of his claims are divorced from reality and a hostage to fortune

Claim: *“The team are exceptional and keen to get the place buzzing again”*



On Sunday 13th July, overcast but a hot day, I walked with Gordon Bulloch down Coire.Cas where we met a mountain biker and his son sweating their way up the hill. Asked why they had not taken the funicular, they replied they had intended to do so, having seen a Facebook post stating it was open to mountain bikers, but had arrived to be told they would not be allowed on. That possibly explained why we saw no-one else on the mountain bike trails above the magic carpets that day.

While the “exceptional team” are NOT responsible for the design flaws of the funicular, which create a major impediment to the place “buzzing” with skiers or biker, they do have some responsibility for the messaging. Since Mike Gifford made no mention of the toxic culture allegations at Cairngorm Mountain or the failure of staff to release information as required under the Data Protection Act ([see here](#)) presumably responsibility for those failures lies with the two previous Chief Executives.

Claim : *“so I do not envisage any problems at all going forward”* referring to the recent health and safety inspection of the funicular.



I thought the crumbling edge of this insitu block I spotted above the metal bearing plate at the passing loop might be significant. But Graham Garfoot told me it probably dated from the original construction and could last a lot longer than other parts of the structure. The repairs should of course guarantee the safety of the funicular given all the money spent on them but, even if safe, some of the finishing is still incomplete:



Plastic caps had been added to some of the metal studding to reduce water ingress. Why not all?

Claim: *“over the last six weeks we have had around 10,000 people travel on it which is amazing”*

Really? 10,000 people in 6 weeks comes to 238 people a day, few enough to have left room for mountain bikes on every train. The business case for repairing the funicular was based on c87,714 summer visits:

Table 5.10: Visitor and income per option

Option	Steady State Visitors per annum				CMSL Income	
	Skier Days	Non-ski Winter	Summer	Total	Total (30 Years)	St
Option 1a	0	0	0	0	£0	
Option 1b	30,000	12,142	26,197	68,340	£39.60 million	£1
Option 2a	30,000	36,060	70,171	136,231	£65.24 million	£2
Option 2b	30,000	36,060	70,171	136,231	£65.24 million	£2
Option 3a	30,000	45,075	87,714	162,789	£77.22 million	£2
Option 3b	30,000	45,075	87,714	162,789	£77.22 million	£2

The figures presented above are exclusive of financial costs (e.g. inflation).

At the current rate it will take HIE about a year just to meet their summer target. As a consequence it is continuing to haemorrhage money and that is even before one takes into account that tickets are being discounted in an attempt to attract visitors.

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