

Artificial Ski Slope

Cairngorm Mountain

Supporting Statement

Revision	Issued to	Issued by	Date of issue	Reason for issue
*	Planning	AG	12.09.2017	Submission
A	Planning	AG	20.02.2018	Submission

## Summary

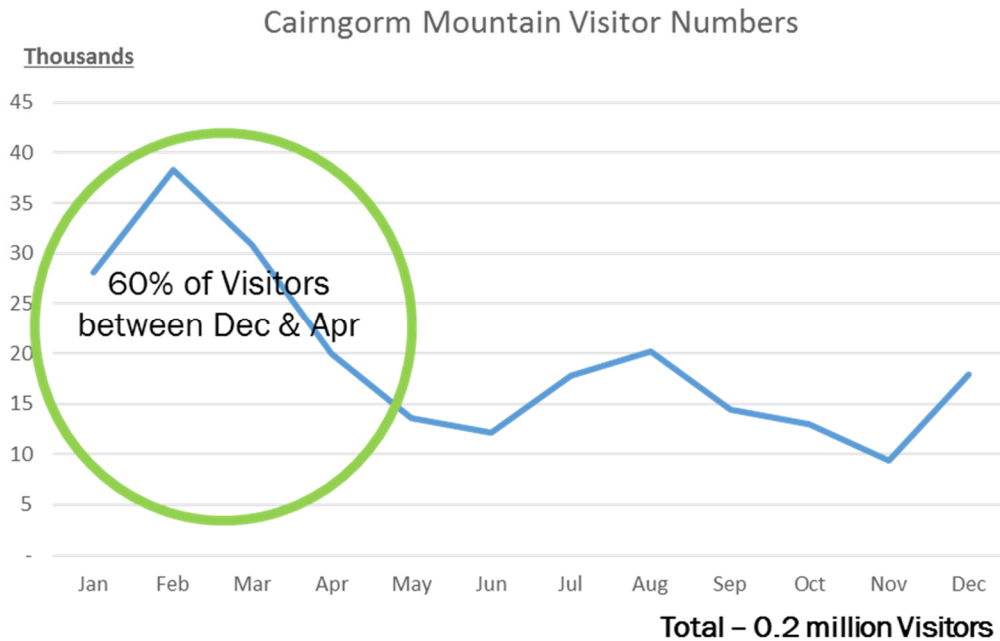
- Cairngorm Mountain Limited has been operating the Cairngorm Mountain Ski Area under new management since 2014 and during this period has gained a clear understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by the heavily seasonal operation.
- The challenges faced by the business through lack of snow has heightened the need to alleviate the strong seasonal nature of the business.
- This planning application will help address the current seasonal challenges faced by the business deliver a dedicated and first rate beginners area and help create a world class year round destination in the heart of the Cairngorm National Park.
- Following the completion of the Pre Application process in conjunction with the Highland Council and the Cairngorm National Park Planning Authority, Cairngorm Mountain Limited would like to submit this detailed planning application for an artificial slope.
- This will create a beginners area 60 metres wide by 30 metres long, served by three magic carpet lifts and an intermediate slope attached to the rear of the beginners area of upto 60 meters (90 meters in total) long and 20 meters wide served by a dedicated magic carpet lift.
- The surface material of the proposed surface is currently being finalised. The final choice of surface will be the most appropriate surface for this particular need taking into consideration the experience, performance and all commercial aspects.

## Background

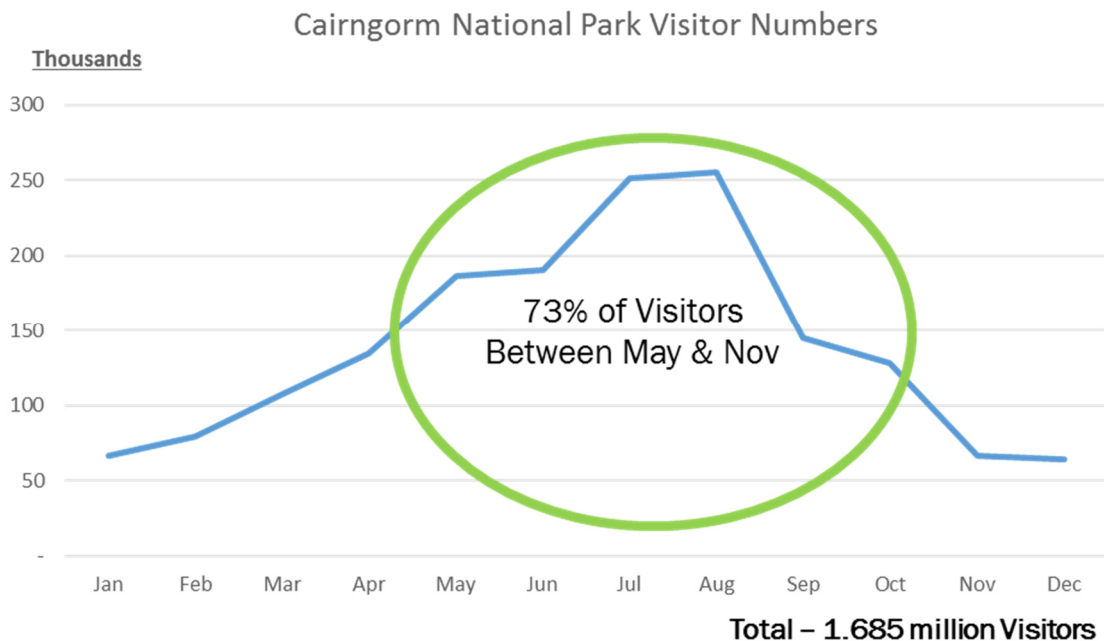
- Cairngorm Mountain is predominantly known for its winter sports with 30 km of ski runs and approximately 33% market share of winter visitor numbers making it the UK's largest mountain ski resort.
- The Mountain is home to the only Funicular railway in Scotland and has the UK's highest restaurant (the Ptarmigan). The facilities within the Day Lodge building at the base of the Mountain include additional food and beverage, snow school, ski and bike hire and retail facilities.

## Visitor Numbers

- Cairngorm Mountain receives on average 210,000 annual visitors, with approximately 60% of visitors arriving in the winter months between December and April.



- This is set against the visitors to the Cairngorm National Park which receives over 1.68 million visitors per annum with around 73% arriving between May and November.



- Popular destinations within the immediate vicinity of Cairngorm Mountain are Aviemore which receives 1.0million annual visitors and Glenmore which has 600,000 people visiting annually.

## Visitors

- During the winter, Cairngorm Mountain has a core market of leisure visitors (mainly Snowsports) that are made up of families, beginners and intermediate winter sports enthusiasts accompanied by friends and families as spectators. Approximately 25% of winter visitors are advanced or expert skiers with the majority of the 1,500 to 2,000 season pass holders falling within this category.
- Within the winter visitors are those who come to the mountain to learn to ski or refresh and improve on their technique. Cairngorm Mountain has a Snowschool which provides lessons for all abilities and of the current visitors attending the Snowschool, 73% are beginners and 27% are of an intermediate ability.
- There is currently a limited summer visitor experience on offer at the mountain with the predominant offering being provided by the Funicular railway, exhibition space and the viewing platform from the Ptarmigan building at the top of the Funicular railway. Visitors are not allowed to exit the Ptarmigan building which is a condition of the Visitor Management Plan put in place following the installation of the Funicular railway.
- There is controlled access from the Ptarmigan building through guided walking trips which have proved popular. The 'Summit walk' enables them to reach the top of CairnGorm having travelled up the mountain using the Funicular Railway. In 2016 between May and November there were over 1,650 people who took advantage of the guided 'Summit Walk'.
- The majority of summer visitors are inactive day visitors – those that come as part of a bigger coach party or with friends and family to utilise the funicular as a way to access the mountain. They will enjoy food in the Ptarmigan or Storehouse and buy gifts and souvenirs in the Outfitters. The wider demographics range from families with young children, to older people, some with disabilities.
- The more active summer visitors such as walkers, nature enthusiasts, hikers and mountain bikers who do not typically use the funicular and tend to walk from the base station to the top of the mountain and beyond to explore the wider Cairngorms.

## Business Impact/Model

- This current operation creates an unsustainable model of seasonal revenue generation. This is exacerbated by a lower spend per head combined with lower visitor numbers in summer compared to winter.
- The uneven distribution of revenue becomes even more unsustainable when the snowfall upon which the winter revenue is dependent fails to materialise. This was the case recently as the Winter of 2016/7 was the worst winter for snow cover since 2002/3 and is having an immense effect on the operation of the business and wider community.
- The over dependency on unreliable winter revenue does not allow the business to forward plan for the investment in and improvement of facilities on the mountain - namely ski infrastructure. The negative impact on revenue caused by unreliable winters also has a direct impact on the summer land management initiatives and maintenance regimes required on the mountain.
- A solution needs to be sought to stabilise the unsustainable, seasonal revenue generation and allow for long term planning for the growth of the operation.

## Business Objectives

- Create world class year round visitor experience by developing more reasons to visit out of the winter season.
- Capture a greater share of the current summer visitors already in the National Park, Aviemore and Glenmore corridor by attracting them to the mountain with new and improved facilities.
- Build on the reputation for activities and adventure that already exists at Cairngorm Mountain and in Aviemore and attract existing winter visitors to the mountain in the summer.
- Increase the uptake and use of existing facilities and infrastructure already in place on the mountain such as Snow School, Hire, Food & Beverage and Retail
- Improve the overall quality of the visitor experience to increase dwell time on the mountain and in the local area.
- Create additional year round, full time employment and avoid the annual loss of experienced and quality staff.
- Appeal to the largest segment of market to maximise likelihood of success
- Stabilise annual revenues and remove reliance on winter income to create a more resilient, year round business

## Options

The following options have been considered in order for the business achieve these objectives:-

### a) New Day Lodge

Owing to the inefficient nature and deteriorating condition of the existing buildings, initial consideration was given replacing these to improve visitor experience and enhance the offering on the mountain. Following initial pre application submission and public liaison and upon further review of the operations in light of the critical nature of the seasonal revenue generations these proposals have been postponed until further notice.

### b) Mountain Biking

The existing uplift infrastructure and topography presents an opportunity to introduce Mountain Biking to the ski area. Investigations and feasibility studies were carried out to assess the potential. These demonstrated that there is potential to create a unique and high quality mountain bike operation with multiple grades of difficulty to cater for a wide market, utilising the existing infrastructure and operating within the ski area. However, upon further investigation and consultation with neighbouring stakeholders there would be a significant amount of legal work required considering the potential impact on the Visitor Management Plan alongside impact on protected species outside the boundary of the ski area. The management team at Cairngorm still wish to investigate the possibility of creating a mountain biking operation but this will not be considered in the current plans and likely to be discussed with neighbours and stakeholders in the future.

### c) Zip Wire

The leading Zip Wire operators in the UK were brought to Cairngorm Mountain to assess the potential for Zip Wire within the ski area. Having carried out a survey of the possible locations Cairngorm Mountain were advised that the gradient of the mountain and current locations of existing infrastructure meant that the installation of a zip wire facility was unfeasible at this time. No engagement with planning authorities took place following this initial site investigation. As technology advances over the coming years this may well be an opportunity Cairngorm Mountain revisit but at this time it is not something the management plan to take forward.

- Beyond the investigation into the above options an alternative perspective was considered that would meet with the targeted business objectives whilst improving the winter visitor experience and supporting winter operations.
- This perspective focussed upon 1) improving the current winter sports beginner experience by creating a dedicated beginners' area around an artificial ski slope and 2) improving the visitor experience in the Ptarmigan building for both summer and winter visitors.
- Having carried out a pre-application submission on both of these items and received feedback from the statutory consultees it was agreed that the best approach would be to take each of these components forward in separate detailed planning applications.
- This application is focussed upon creating a dedicated beginners' area through the installation of an artificial ski slope which can operate all year round.

## Artificial ski slope – Objectives

- When assessing a potential Artificial Ski Slope at Cairngorm Mountain the following objectives had been set by the business: -
  - Provide the best, purpose built beginners surface to ensure the best in class beginner facility
  - Provide a less hostile location for Snow School lessons that will improve the beginner experience
  - Provide dedicated, beginner friendly uplift
  - Provide the opportunity for beginners to progress onto an intermediate area
  - Protect and the increase Snow School revenues by being less prone to cancellation
  - Create a learning environment in a location away from the traffic of the main slopes and without the need to use the main ski uplift on the way to the current beginners area
  - Create a beginners' area close to existing facilities such as Hire to minimise travel time to lessons
  - Locate a beginners' area close to existing amenities and provide better opportunities for family viewing
  - Provide a surface that can be operated all year round to strengthen the non winter performance of the business
  - Provide a surface that allows for additional summer operations such as tubing, ringos or sledging

## Business Case

- Having prepared a sensitised business model to support the commercial rationale for an artificial slope, the operation proved viable operating just 960 hours per annum, at less than 30% of total user capacity.
- At maturity, this equates to a combination of approximately 7,000 beginners and intermediate skiers and snowboarders taking lessons using the artificial slope.
- This operation is expected to create the full time equivalent of 20 roles during the summer period when the business would typically lose valuable instructors to other seasonal opportunities.
- The target market for this facility would be beginners with over 70% of the users expected to be taking lessons for the first time.
- The balance of the users is expected to be made up of intermediates or those looking for a refresher of skills prior to using snow.
- As the artificial slope would operating during the non-winter months, the significant number of summer visitors to the Cairngorm National Park and Aviemore would be a key target market – providing a new reason to visit the mountain and surrounding area during summer visits.
- The business will seek to work with local schools, snow schools to create year-round operations as a key opportunity within the current market. The ability for local business to extent their winter operations through supported use of the artificial slope in summer is to be explored.



- Furthermore there are opportunities to work with local instruction and guiding centres to allow them to utilise this facility to provide additional courses all year round.

## Surface Appraisal

- A thorough surface appraisal is ongoing and is considering the following:-
  - a commercial appraisal of the capital cost, maintenance and operation of the surfaces
  - the strengths and weaknesses of each surface from both teaching and learning perspectives
  - the suitability of each surface for beginners
  - the safety records of each surface
  - environmental considerations
- Once the appraisal has been concluded the chosen surface will be presented either as part of this application or specified as a pre commencement condition
- The size, location, shape and uplift provision specified in this application will remain the same for all surfaces which will all be green in colour.

## Visitor Management Plan

- The visitor management plan was originally introduced as part of the project to develop the funicular mountain railway and is to protect the integrity of the adjacent areas which have been designated under the European Habitats and Birds Directives, from the potential impacts of non-skiing visitors as a direct consequence of the funicular development.
- All future proposed development projects non the mountain should consider the potential impact they may have on the visitor management plan.
- The potential impact on the visitor management plan of the artificial slope has been considered and Cairngorm Mountain cannot foresee any issues that will arise from the introduction of the visitor management plan that would compromise the visitor management plan primarily due to the fact that the proposed slope and associated, dedicated uplift is completely independent of the Railway.
- Potential indirect impacts have also been considered as to whether the proposed slope could put further pressure on the designated areas out with the ski area boundary? This has been considered and determined that the slope will place no further pressure on the designated areas out with the ski area boundary.
- The area for the proposed artificial ski slope is contained within the transitional management zone next to the visitor welcome zone and overlaps the developed zone. It would be difficult to argue people that were attracted to use the artificial slopes ski slope would wish to go beyond the ski area boundary which extends well beyond the boundary of the artificial slope.