



A Vision for Cairngorm Mountain – Position Statement

1. Introduction

1.1 Mountaineering Scotland is concerned about the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the future of the ski area and the funicular railway at Cairngorm Mountain and the significant impact the current situation is having on the local economy. A Masterplan for the development of the mountain estate under the ownership and management of Highlands and Islands Enterprise is proposed with publication in the spring of 2020.

1.2 We wish to ensure that any Masterplan or similar land use management proposal takes into account the aspirations of the walking, climbing and snowsport-touring community. Our focus of interest here is:

- maintaining and improving access to the Cairngorm mountains for outdoor recreation throughout the year;
- ensuring that any proposed developments are appropriate in terms of their impact on the wild qualities of the landscape and the conservation of a nationally important natural resource for people and for wildlife; and
- the provision of low-carbon, green-tourism services delivered by a viable local economy.

2. Context

2.1. The Cairngorm ski area is one of the most important access points in Scotland for walkers, climbers and ski-tourers, and the slopes up from Glenmore to Cairngorm itself are a national showcase of Scotland's mountain environment for both visitors and local residents. Our concern in this matter stems from the lack of investment in the infrastructure over many years, especially car parking areas and hill paths and tracks, and in summer the appearance and environmental impact of the area around the centre is not of a quality that would be expected in a National Park.

2.2. Mountaineering Scotland's vision for the future of the mountains, Respecting Scotland's Mountains, supports actions that will achieve: "A mountain environment whose wildness is respected, maintained and safeguarded for the benefit of present and future generations"; and "vibrant communities in mountain areas that have the chance to develop facilities and programmes to benefit their economies and enrich the experience of visitors, whilst at the same time protecting the mountain environment."

2.3. The importance of the Cairngorm Mountain estate to the National Park and the local economy is amply demonstrated by the Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy, approved by the Cairngorm National Park Authority in 2016. A key statement from the Strategy is: "We want Cairngorm and Glenmore to be recognised as an exemplar of managing conservation and recreation in a sensitive environment."

2.4. An important point to consider also is the effect of rapid and unpredictable climate change on the mountain environment. This variability in rainfall and snowfall means that traditional use of the mountain estate for downhill skiing in winter will continue to be unpredictable as the altitudinal limit of lying snow and its depth varies year from year. Adaptation of the traditional downhill skiing model is a major point to consider in business terms. Extreme weather events have been noted in Scotland and the summer experience of the mountain will be similarly affected by variable cloud and rainfall patterns.

2.5. The Cairngorm Mountain estate is held in public ownership by Highlands and Islands Enterprise, adjacent to a large extent of the National Forest Estate managed by Forestry and Land Scotland. This is a very significant expanse of mountain and forest held in trust for the people of Scotland. Public policy published by the Scottish Government is a major consideration in developing the estate for both private and public benefit.

2.6 Some key public policy areas that will need to be taken into account are the Climate Emergency declared by the Scottish Government in April 2019 and recent climate change legislation, biodiversity and flood risk policies, forestry and land management strategies, economy and tourism, and landscape and planning policy, not least of which is contributing to the purposes of the National Park and the aforementioned Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy. Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Masterplan or similar land use management plan or programme will be essential.

2.7 Wild Land is a national asset, as stated in national planning policy, and the Cairngorm Mountain estate is the gateway for the many visitors who wish to experience the wild qualities for which the mountain massif is known.

3. The way forward

3.1 We anticipate that the Masterplan or similar land use proposals will be sympathetic to the landscape and sensitive ecosystem of Cairngorm Mountain whilst creating a suitable ski area environment and self-sustaining tourist destination which contributes to the local green-tourism economy. **The Masterplan or similar plan or programme will demonstrate its fit within the current policy and legislative framework** for landscape and wildlife in Scotland.

3.2 The importance, the value of the mountain lies in its setting, its natural environment. The appeal to visitors lies in exploring its grandeur in all seasons: the forested hillside with natural woodland expansion, the moorland slopes to the plateau, harsh yet fragile, the high snowclad slopes and corries in winter. **Outdoor recreation opportunities will be promoted to suit a range of abilities**, while fostering in visitors an understanding and appreciation of the beauty and wildness of mountain landscapes and wildlife

3.3 The value of wild land in Scotland is perceived to be important to visitors and residents alike. **The mountain environment here will be an experience of wildness for everyone**, from family walks around the Coire Cas car park, to more strenuous hillwalking to the plateau, climbing on the numerous crags and snowsport-touring across the mountainside in winter.

3.4 The Coire Cas car park is the most popular place to access the Cairngorm Mountains, offering relatively easy access to the fragile arctic/alpine high ground of the Cairngorms. Linkages of **routes and paths between forest and mountain will be clear for visitors** whose abilities are suited to paths, as well as allowing for personal exploration of the high mountain through informal routes.

3.5 Skiing facilities will be leaner and more flexible than in the past, fit to take advantage of what snow is available in each year. **Flexibility in uplift and ticketing options will allow visitors to explore and learn a range of snowsport options** to take advantage of the availability of snow beyond the boundaries of the ski area. Winter climbing and walking will be recognised as activities which sit alongside the ski offer in the winter months.

3.6 Linking green tourism with climate change emissions targets in legislation indicates that in future, fossil fuelled vehicles accessing main car parks will reduce in number as a carbon-neutral transport system is developed connecting readily accessible rail, bus and car parking with the

mountain slopes. **Walking, climbing and snowsport-touring will be enabled through good quality, low-carbon parking facilities and public transport and active travel connections with Aviemore and Glenmore.** The roll out of EV charging points in the mountain car parks will be an indicator of progress.

3.7 The Cairngorm Mountain estate lies within part of the largest continuous area of natural and semi natural native woodland in the UK. **The wild qualities of the Cairngorm Mountain estate will increase through natural woodland development,** including montane trees and shrubs, and will be a valuable contributor to the Cairngorms Connect landscape initiative.

3.8 Infrastructure will be designed and built in a way that does not detract from the increase in the wild qualities of the estate landscape and wildlife that lives there. Visitors will be able to use facilities in all seasons.

3.9 Assessment of the future of the Funicular railway will take into account how it contributes to the development of quality outdoor recreation experiences in both summer and winter and the financial sustainability of any future business model. Should a decision be taken to remove the funicular it will be dismantled and the landscape restored to the highest of standards.

*Approved by Board of Directors
7 November 2019*