

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

---

**Title: PLANNING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN  
2011/12 – PROGRESS REPORT**

**Prepared by: Don McKee, Head Planner**

---

1. The purpose of this paper is to update Members on progress with implementation of the 2011/12 Planning Service Improvement Plan that was approved by the Planning Committee in June 2011 and promote discussion on priority areas of work for the years ahead for incorporation in the Corporate Plan.

2. **Recommendation:**

- **That Members note progress on implementation of the 2011/12 Planning Service Improvement Plan.**

3. **Background**

3.1 The provision of the CNPA Planning Service is one of the most important tools that CNPA has available to achieve the vision in the National Park Plan. It is also one of the few public services that CNPA provides directly. Our Planning Service is high profile and, in common with other planning authorities in Scotland, the CNPA prepares an annual Service Improvement Plan setting out the actions we will take during the year to improve the service taking account of feedback and experience from the preceding year.

3.2 The Planning Committee on 24 June noted the implementation of the 2010/11 Service Improvement Plan and approved the current SIP for 2011/12 with implementation delegated to Management Team. The SIP contains 8 key headings with 23 actions to be implemented by the end of March 2012 and a new SIP will then be in place for 2012/13.

Since the Service Improvement Plan (SIP) was drawn up the economic situation has worsened, and we are aware of the need to help ensure the planning service works as effectively and efficiently as possible to get the best possible outcomes for the National Park.

3.3 Section 4 of this report sets out progress on the 2011/12 SIP in *italics* with reference to the individual actions within the 8 key headings.

4. **Progress on 2011/12 SIP**

Management Team undertook a review of progress of the Plan in early November. While there has been considerable progress on several of the key areas, as outlined below, it was identified that there was a requirement for further concerted and focussed effort by all the key staff involved so that the Plan is delivered within the year. Murray Ferguson and Don McKee have been reviewing the staff resources available across the organisation to make sure that the Plan is given very high priority and is delivered effectively.

I. A user-oriented Service

- a. Discuss with partners the benefits and costs of CNPA becoming full planning authority.

*As a NPA we deliver our planning service in accordance with the provisions of the Designation Order and this is therefore not an issue where CNPA takes the lead. However, the administration of the call-in function is an issue that is frequently raised by users of the planning service and feedback from our public engagement meetings is that users find the current call-in arrangements confusing. If others bring forward proposals for change, then we need to be able to assess the implications for the authority. Within this context, there has been some discussion on the issue with the Local Authorities, Audit Scotland and Scottish Government at various levels. No further action proposed at present*

- b. Deliver four community-focussed events, undertake post-event review and plan follow-on events or approach for the next year.

*We ran these events in June 2011 and, whilst useful and informative for the limited number who attended, our review has concluded that a different approach is needed in future in order to reach and engage on planning matters with a wider range and number of communities and individuals in the Park. During the year there has also been additional community engagement via the National Park Plan/Main Issues Report Consultation and attendance at meetings of the Association of Cairngorms Communities. We are currently preparing an enhanced and more targeted approach to community engagement on planning matters to take us through 2012/13 and beyond. Our intention is to launch this as a Planning and Communities Initiative and details will be made available to Members in the new year.*

- c. Convene two independently-facilitated Planning Service Workshops with Community Liaison Officers to gather feedback about the Planning Service (Nov 2011) and how it can be improved.

*We have taken stock of the experience of the workshops held in March 2011 under the 2010/11 SIP as well as the events in 1 b) above. We are also aware that there are ongoing concerns within the development sector with regard to some aspects of our planning function and further engagement is required to improve mutual understanding. The intention is to focus the community feedback via the approach referred to in 1 b) and to establish a standing Developer Forum to engage with developers agents etc. The first meeting of this forum will be in January 2012 and will provide a regular means of exchanging views and information on the planning service with a view to making it work better for all involved. We are also conscious that there has to be some community representation in this forum and vice versa to enhance mutual understanding between communities and the development sector.*

- d. Arrange independent analysis of the feedback received though consultation on the Local Development Plan Main Issues Report.

*This is in hand and the results will be reported to Members in due course.*

- e. As part of refreshed the new CNP website (due August 2011) provide clearer information about the planning service and promote active engagement.

*The new website has been launched and there have already been some changes to the planning content. Further improvements will be made in 2011/12 and in particular the Planning Leaflet (also to be in hard form) and Frequently Asked Questions will be in place by January 2012. We will also be including case studies on the website to reflect some of the decisions that have been taken over the last few years.*

- f. Develop a system to capture feedback about all aspects of the Planning Service on a routine basis using internet based service (ie using Survey Monkey or similar).

*Development of this is almost complete and a survey (similar to that used by Highland Council) will be attached to all planning e mail communications from January. The results will be periodically reported to Members and will contribute to improvements to the service.*

2. A strengthened role for the Planning Service in achieving Sustainable Rural Development

- a. Scope a Sustainable Design Award for the Park (with a view to launch during Spring 2012) as part of an integrated programme of work around design matters.

*Work has been taking place and there will be a report to the Planning Committee on 6 January 2012.*

- b. Deliver, and keep under review, a structured programme of development activity for Planning Committee (including field visits to see issues on the ground and sessions on best practice in design for members and staff of CNPA and Local Authorities involving architects / local builders / developers and craftspeople).

*The Planning Committee has already had sessions on developer contributions and small scale hydro. A programme incorporating suggestions already made by Members will be available for the meeting on 9 December.*

- c. Scope out how best to engage with the development sector to share good practice and training opportunities to help ensure the skills required to take good design forward are available in the locality.

*The report on to Planning Committee on 6 January 2012 will cover this action.*

- d. Scope out proposals for establishing a Design Review Panel for the Park, where a group of (mainly) architects, chaired by CNPA, would meet periodically to discuss and review major applications – providing expert professional input.

*A number of planning authorities have Design Review Panels and Architecture + Design Scotland are increasingly promoting their use. We have looked at a number of existing panels, the way they operate and how this could translate to the CNP situation. Discussions are under way and arrangements for a Panel should be in place by end of 2011/12.*

- e. Investigate development of an energy saving information initiative for prospective planning applicants (with Energy Savings Trust or similar).

*This is being incorporated in design work under 2 a) and c).*

- f. Pilot a stream of work with Planning Aid Scotland to promote awareness of the planning process amongst young people and in schools.

*There has been discussion with Planning Aid Scotland on the range of school and youth programmes they have run in a number of authorities. Our intention is to have a pilot in the first instance probably focussing on 2 schools in different areas of the Park. Planning is underway with a view to roll out in academic year 2012/13.*

3. Efficient and effective “call in” procedure

- a. Review electronic “call in” procedure (by end October) and implement any necessary changes.

*Members have received and considered this report.*

4. Joint working with local authorities and community councils

- a. Agree revised protocol with local authority partners and extend scope to include issues beyond Planning (e.g. affordable housing, etc)

*The revised Protocol has been drafted and expanded beyond development management to embrace the local development plan, role of the National Park Plan, role of CNPA and 5LAs on housing matters. It will shortly be shared with the 5LAs with a view to a Protocol Meeting in January/February 2012 to formally accept it and agree its implementation.*

- b. Offer to meet with at least half of Community Councils annually to discuss Planning Service and how it can be improved

*The intention is to send a letter from the Head Planner to all Community Councils/Associations following the Planning Committee to inform them of the intended new Planning and Communities Initiative that will be rolled out in 2012/13. This action will be part of that package of activity.*

- c. Develop a network of Planning Contacts in each Community Council and share best practice.

*This is central to the proposed Planning and Communities Initiative referred to in 1 b) above. Around two thirds of Community Councils have a planning contact. We are asking the remainder to nominate one also and a network will be established by CNPA in conjunction with AoCC to meet, exchange best practice and facilitate work on awareness of planning amongst communities.*

5. Enforcement activity

- a. Arrange shared services approach to enforcement with local authorities, particularly in relation to Highland Council area.

*Discussions are in progress and will be taken further at the Protocol Meeting in the new year.*

6. E-planning

- a. Implement E-planning information system for planning applications (by end July)

*The system is being arranged and hosted by Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NPA. Whilst it is now mostly in place there have been a number technical issues that have delayed progress. We have not yet launched the web based public access to the system as we wanted to be confident they had been resolved and people would be able to access the system and see all of the information in relation to any application. Outstanding issues are being addressed via LLTNPA as a matter of urgency so that the system can go live in January 2012.*

- b. Promote online Development Plan (which is already available for Local Plan) and implement of for Local Development Plan

*This is on course.*

- c. Publicise availability of E-planning system to promote greater involvement in planning process.

*Once issues in 6 a) have been resolved the system will be publicised on the website and elsewhere.*

7. Determination rates of applications

- a. Arrange for delegation of authority to refuse applications due to lack of information to Head Planner

*A report will be brought to the Planning Committee on 6 January 2012 setting out the terms on which it will be recommended that delegated authority should be given.*

- b. Publish key planning performance statistics on CNP website once launched (due August 2011).

*We are doing this in tandem with the actions under 1 e) and f) for January 2012.*

8. Joint work with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NPA

- a. Undertake joint work with LLT NPA in relation to key areas of planning policy (including Renewables)

*This work is ongoing and there has already been joint working on issues in relation to National Scenic Areas and review of the General Permitted Development Order. Work is currently taking place on aspects of renewable policy. Further areas will be identified.*

5. **Recommendation:**

- **That Members note progress on implementation of the 2011/12 Planning Service Improvement Plan.**

6. **Looking Ahead**

- 6.1 The CNPA Planning Service will continue to have a high profile and, as with all other planning authorities, our service is under scrutiny from Scottish Government and everyone who uses the service. We want to make our service as effective and accessible as possible for everyone who uses it. Planning will therefore be an important component of the next Corporate Plan which will be coming before the Board in March 2012. The Service Improvement Plan for 2012/13 will reflect and help deliver the Corporate Plan, and a report will be brought to the Planning Committee on 30 March 2012.
- 6.2 The progress report on the various actions in Section 4 above will have given a flavour of what is likely to feature in the next SIP, including more intensive engagement with the development sector, implementation of the planning and communities initiative, launch of design award and promotion of design, planning in schools, further development of the website and delivering the new protocol with the local authorities. Finally, as ever, we will continue to invite suggestions for improvements from all users of the service as well as listening to feedback and learning from experience.

**Don McKee**

[planning@cairngorms.co.uk](mailto:planning@cairngorms.co.uk)

30 November 2011