

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

PLANNING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2010 – 2011

1. Background

The Scottish Government considers that a reformed and improved planning system is essential to their single overarching purpose: “To focus government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth”.

In the Cairngorms National Park the provision of an effective and efficient planning service is a very significant tool to achieve the agreed vision for the Park in 2030, as set out in the Cairngorms National Park Plan.

For these both these reasons the National Park Authority has agreed to set out a plan to identify areas for planning service improvement and how best they can be tackled.

2. Planning functions in the National Park

The planning arrangements in the Cairngorms National Park are unique in Scotland and are delivered on a collaborative basis between the National Park Authority and the five relevant local authorities. The key features are:

- The Park Authority has a duty to prepare the National Park Plan for the Park which is approved by Ministers and gives appropriate strategic context and direction to all other planning-related work in the Park;
- The Park Authority has duty to prepare a single Local Plan (now Local Development Plan) for the Park; and
- Anyone seeking planning permission applies to the relevant local authority; the Park Authority then “calls in” those applications that are judged to be of “general significance to the aims of the Park” and from that point on acts as the planning authority. All remaining applications are determined by the local authorities.

The planning arrangements are comprehensively described in Section 1 of the Cairngorms National Park Local Plan (adopted 29 October 2010). [[hyperlink](#)]

3. Scope of this Plan

This is a plan for the remainder of the period November 2010 to end of March 2011. The Plan complements those achievements which have already agreed as part of the CNPA Corporate Plan (See Annex 1). This plan is submitted to Scottish Government as part of a

wider package of measures concerning Planning Reform and will be reviewed in March 2011 and a new plan prepared for the next financial year.

The plan has been drawn up after considering best practice advice from Scottish Government and the Service Improvement Plans submitted by other Scottish planning authorities. An audit has been undertaken of the CNPA Development Management function and the key findings have been taken into account in preparing this Service Improvement Plan. The draft plan has been discussed with relevant partner organisations.

4. Recent achievements and other changes

This plan is set in the context number very significant recent achievements and other changes, all of which will have a bearing on an ongoing process of planning service improvements:

- Adoption (in October 2010) of the first ever Local Plan for a National Park in Scotland;
- Adoption (in October 2010) of the first batch of Supplementary Planning Guidance on a diverse range of topics including Sustainable Design, Natural Heritage and Water Resources;
- Publication of the Development Plan Scheme and initiation of work on the Local Development Plan;
- Change to the Designation Order for the Park (in October 2010) which had the effect of:
 - Expansion of the National Park to include a substantial part of Perth and Kinross;
 - Reducing the size of the Board from 25 to 19 members;
 - Clarifying the planning arrangements so that can CNPA operate in a way which is consistent with recent planning reforms in which delegation contributes to more efficient decision making.
- A review of the Protocol between CNPA and the five relevant planning authorities has been initiated and will be finalised through the actions agreed in this plan.
- CNPA internal staff structure changed (in June 2010) to promote integration of the planning service with the wider work of the organisation.

5. Key areas for Service Improvement

a) A User-oriented service:

Why Improvement is required? To ensure that the planning service is always focused on the requirements of users and towards a set of our outcomes that are strongly linked to the vision for the Park in 2030.

We will:

	Timescale
Convene a Planning Service Feedback Forum for developers, agents, community councils, amenity organisations and agency representatives to encourage feedback about our Planning Service and prepare our next Service Improvement Plan. Feedback from this Forum will assist in preparing future Service Improvement Plans.	By February 2011
Prepare a programme of planning training for communities and other interested parties	By March 2011
Publish an updated planning information leaflet and promote the Supplementary Planning Guidance and the importance of pre-application discussions to ensure that applications stand the best possible chance of being approved.	By March 2011

b) A strengthened role for the Planning Service in achieving Sustainable Rural Development:

Why Improvement is required? It is necessary to firmly embed the work of the Planning Service in the wider work of CNPA and the achievement of the vision for the Park in 2030 in the National Park Plan.

We will:

	Timescale
Prepare plans, with partners, for Sustainable Design Award scheme for the National Park.	By March 2011
Improve our capability to collate and analyse planning related	By December

data through development of a work-stream dedicated to this function	2010
Approve for consultation a further batch of Supplementary Planning Guidance	By February 2011
Review and Update the Development Plan Scheme	By March 2011
Draw up a structured programme of development activity for the Planning Committee involving site visits and sessions on particular topics	By February 2011

c) Changes to “Call-in” procedure

Why Improvement is required? The Board has agreed in principle, subject to satisfactory trial arrangements to simplify the “call in” procedure for planning applications by working towards an electronic system that allows members to scrutinise applications remotely and respond to Officers’ recommendations accordingly. This will bring efficiency benefits and reduce CNPA carbon emissions through less travel while still allowing for transparency about which planning applications have been “called in” and why.

We will:

	Timescale
Finish the ongoing trial arrangements for the new electronic “call in” system and review Committee meeting schedule accordingly	By January 2011

d) Joint working with local authorities

Why Improvement is required? Now that the new Local Plan for the Park has been adopted it is important that we reinforce our already strong working relationships with the five local authorities.

We will:

	Timescale
Agree revised Protocol for planning with partner local authorities	By February 2011
Make special efforts to work closely with Perth and Kinross	By March 2011

Council who are new to the National Park	
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e) Enforcement activity

Why Improvement is required? Enforcement activity is an important part of an effective and efficient planning service. CNPA has one Enforcement Officer and there would be benefits (both financial and in terms of effectiveness) of developing a more robust working arrangement with the relevant local authorities across the Park.

We will:

	Timescale
Publish and distribute the Enforcement Charter	By November 2010
Initiate discussions on a shared services approach to enforcement across the National Park in conjunction with relevant local authorities	By February 2011

f) E-planning

Why Improvement is required? Making planning information available through electronic media is part of a Scotland-wide initiative as part of Planning for Change Programme. It will help facilitate broader public engagement and make the planning process more efficient for all interested parties. The new system will also make data-sharing between planning authorities easier and will help generate useful management information. CNPA are working in collaboration with working with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NPA as part of shared services programme to implement the initiative.

We will:

	Timescale
Make the Online Development Plan available	By March 2011
Make the Online Planning Information System live – to show same info online as any other planning in Scotland	By March 2011

g) Determination rate of applications

Why Improvement is required? There is some concern about the perception that the “call in” approach which CNPA is obliged to use slows down the planning process. In fact the evidence for this is rather thin. There are a complex range of factors which influence how long it takes to process applications, the most common delays being due to the poor quality of some applications and the failure of applicants or their agents to supply the necessary information. With the recent adoption of the Local Plan and Supplementary Planning Guidance there are opportunities for the process to be speeded up while still maintaining an overall approach to determinations that are well thought through and in line with policy.

We will:

	Timescale
Conduct further discussions with relevant local authorities about the importance of the validation stage so that applications can be dealt with effectively.	By February 2011
Investigate the benefits of delegation of authority to refuse applications due to lack of information to Head of Development Management	By February 2011
Make substantial new efforts to meet the target timescales for local and major developments as set down by Scottish Government (2 and 4 months respectively), recognising that an appropriate allowance has to be made for the time taken to “call in” the applications (which Scottish Government accept).	By March 2011
Publish key planning performance statistics on our website including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proportion of planning applications in the Park called in • proportion of approvals/refusals • determination rate of applications 	By February 2011

Feedback on this plan and on any aspect of our Planning Service is always welcome and should be sent to planning@cairngorms.co.uk. If you require further information please contact:

Don McKee
Cairngorms National Park Authority
Albert Memorial Hall, Station Square
Ballater
(t) 01339 753601
(f) 01339 755334
Email: planning@cairngorms.co.uk

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Annex I: Extract from CNPA Corporate Plan with achievements and milestones for 2010/11

Making Housing More Affordable and Sustainable	
Achievement	Milestone for March 2011
The Authority achieves an increase in the proportion of affordable housing from relevant developments through the interaction of its planning policies and development management activities.	An increasing trend in the proportion of affordable housing arising from relevant planning approvals.
Through proactive research and engagement with partners, the Authority identifies and promotes suitable sites for affordable housing.	Annual increase in area of land being considered as having potential for affordable housing.
The Authority helps stimulates a wider range of affordable housing initiatives coming forward for development within the National Park.	Support 2 Rural Housing Enablers, and initiatives with private landowners/ developers at 4 sites.
The Authority promotes improvements in the sustainable design of housing within the National Park.	Adoption and promotion of sustainable design guide. Promotion of at least one new demonstration event.

Planning and Development Management	
The Authority provides a planning service for the National Park that is proactive, efficient and effective, and that contributes to achieving the Park aims and to delivery of the National Park Plan.	Effective: % applications determined within 4 months of call-in. Efficient: no. of applications determined per FTE NPP: through other KPIs / milestones
Local Plan is in place and used as a basis for encouraging and managing sustainable development in the Park.	Local Plan adopted.
The Authority has made significant progress in the development of the Local Development Plan for the	Consultation completed on main Issues Report.

National Park.	
Supplementary guides are in place including Sustainable Design Guide, Renewable Energy, Developer Contributions, Natural Heritage, Landscape and Carbon.	All Supplementary Guidance adopted
Enforcement monitoring of the local plan and planning and development management process and conditions.	Reviews undertaken of 50 developments or expression of concern.
E-Planning regime established and widely used.	E-planning system implemented.

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