
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: Planning Service Improvements 2015/16

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Purpose of Report

To review progress over the last year and ask the Planning Committee to consider and approve Planning Service improvements for 2015/16.

Summary

The Planning Committee consider a set of Planning Service improvements to be delivered each year as part of our pro-active approach to performance improvement. During 2014/15 the Planning Service went through a period of considerable change involving relocation of posts from Ballater to Grantown and some significant staff turnover. During the year the team delivered against 10 of 14 priorities that had been identified, progressed the work on the Local Development Plan through to adoption and resolved a number of complex and long-standing Development Management cases. One of the priorities for the year involved development of a Planning Service Charter and this is attached for consideration and approval. For the year ahead, 10 service improvements have been identified. Once approved, they will be included in individual staff work programmes for 2015/16.

Recommendation

That the Committee:

- a) Consider and approve the CNPA Planning Service improvements for 2015/16; and
- b) Consider and approve the CNPA Planning Service Charter.

PLANNING SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS 2015/16

Background

1. In April 2014, the CNPA Planning Committee approved Planning Service priorities for 2014/15 as part of the Operational Plan. Those priorities have informed the work of the Service during 2014/15 and are important foundations for the CNPA’s Planning Performance Framework (PPF) report which is required by Scottish Government each year.

2. The Board approved the CNPA Corporate and Operational Plans earlier in March. The Corporate Plan 2015-18 set out the National Park Vision and the CNPA Mission and Values and used each of the three long-term outcomes in the National Park Partnership Plan as the basis for setting out the CNPA’s role in Conservation, Visitor Experience and Rural Development. Our role, under Rural Development, was set out as follows:

Delivery of our priorities within the National Park can only come through close joint working with the people who live and work in the communities of the Park. Our role is to promote investment in a diversified economy, help communities plan and achieve their own visions and deliver a Planning Service to guide the right development to the right place.

3. The Operational Plan 2015/16 was also approved in March, setting out budget and staff time allocations, and the following was agreed as one of three internal priorities to sit alongside a number of specific project priorities:

Implementation of our Planning Service improvements as part of significant change management process within the Service

Review of Service Priorities from 2014/15

4. The 14 service improvements agreed in April 2014 are shown in Table I along with a brief progress report on delivery.

Table I

CNPA Planning Service improvements 2014/15		Summary of Progress
1	Complete move of Planning Service staff to Grantown-on-Spey	Completed
2	Undertake feedback exercise with Community Council/Association Planning Representatives Network on recent LDP process to improve ease of engagement for next LDP	Not Completed To be undertaken in 2015/16.

CNPA Planning Service improvements 2014/15		Summary of Progress
3	Establish partner coordination group to deliver LDP Action Programme and use the monitoring reports to highlight importance and value of consented/delivered development.	Completed A Strategic Planning Group (for NPPP and LDP2) was established and met in Feb 2015 and will also keep oversight of LDP implementation.
4	Establish procedure advice notes across planning service to help customers understand key Local Development Plan implementation topics and development management procedure issues.	Completed 5 Planning Advice Notes are on website: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applying for planning permission; • Changing a planning permission; • European Protected Species; • Planning Committee site visits • Agricultural and Forestry Tracks
5	Implement new call-in categories across Park and deliver a more consistent pre-application service with 5 councils	Completed call-in categories and review of call-in procedures Call-in categories have been published in Cairngorms Planning Advice Note. Part-completed Pre-application Service New pre-application procedure has been introduced following trials and feedback from other local authorities. New procedures were discussed with all 5 LPAs in Planning Protocol Meeting in Dec 14, and to be embedded in revised Protocol. A Planning Advice Note on Pre-Application Advice is scheduled for website in April 2015.
6	Offer processing agreements on all applications likely to be called in or called in by the CNPA.	Completed Processing agreements now offered on all applications called in by CNPA.
7	Established Customer Service Charter for Planning Service focussing on development management and day to day service provision that is not covered by the Enforcement Charter and Development Plan Schemes already in place.	Completed Charter completed for Committee approval.
8	Review the delivery of planning gain service for the CNPA to establish most efficient service for all	Part Completed Review complete and new process discussed with all 5 local authorities in

CNPA Planning Service improvements 2014/15		Summary of Progress
	parties involved.	Planning Protocol Meeting in Dec 14, and to be embedded in revised Protocol Agreement.
9	Review internal procedures and processes to improve efficiency and speed of decisions and introduce internal determination timescale targets to reduce overall determination timescales.	Completed Internal determination timescale targets introduced and determination timescales improving. Internal processes reviewed and formalised. New internal procedures for: Pre-application advice, Developer contributions, Call-in categories.
10	Simplify and improve the customer focus of the CNPA planning web pages and provide quicker routes to applications and open consultations	Part Completed Internal review undertaken; More work to be done as part of wider CNPA website review. New web pages to be ready for testing May 15.
11	Review Enforcement Charter and investigate greater integration of enforcement between CNPA and 5 Councils	Completed Greater level of integration between authorities being taken forward as part of revised Protocol Agreement and Monitoring and Enforcement Officer continuation plan.
12	Establish plan for Enforcement Officer role from July 2015	Not Completed To be undertaken in 2015/16.
13	Undertake skills audit of planning team and establish a prioritised training/enhancement plan, including training activities on natural heritage skills and advice, delivery of the new LDP for the Park, and planning support team training on Uniform administration and template modification.	Not Completed: To be undertaken drawign on Staff Performance Appraisal in 2015/16
14	Review options for CNPA member involvement in pre-application discussions.	Not Completed Initial work undertaken, but put on hold pending LDP adoption work and review of Code of Conduct. To be undertaken in 2015/16

5. We have delivered against 10 of the 14 priorities that we set out for 2014/15. Progress on some priorities was delayed by the loss of staff in the Local Development Plan team and the focus on priority casework. In undertaking the service improvement work we have established a clear structure for establishing, and embedding changes in service

delivery, with three main tools that support us. Firstly, a series of internal Procedure Notes now guide the processes and procedures of the Planning Service so that all staff are clear about the role they play in making the system work. The written procedures also help with continuity at times of change. Secondly, our Cairngorms Planning Advice Notes (CPANs) provide clear, customer-focussed advice on aspects of the planning system to complement our LDP and Supplementary Guidance. Thirdly, through our enhanced joint work with our colleagues in local authority planning services, we are making changes to the processes to ensure the customer experience is as smooth as possible.

6. During the year, a Best Value Review of the Planning Service was undertaken to assist the team in dealing with the change process that was under way. An implementation plan prepared by the Director of Planning and Rural Development was considered by CNPA Management Team. The considerations of the Review have been either been implemented or are scheduled to be addressed 2015/16.
7. In addition, staff have participated in national training events and seminars associated with improving planning performance. CNPA is part of a benchmarking initiative coordinated by Heads of Planning Scotland and Scottish Government that provides useful information on comparative performance with similar planning authorities.
8. We will update the Committee with a comprehensive report on PPF delivery and performance once all the statistical information is available and before the formal PPF report is sent to Scottish Government in July 2015.

Planning Service Charter

9. A Planning Service Charter (see Appendix 1) was identified within the last year as one of the improvements required in relation to customer service. The Charter has been prepared following a review of best practice by other planning authorities in Scotland. It incorporates the work that was undertaken by the Committee on communication themes earlier in 2014 and addresses several of the issues identified in the Best Value Review in terms of vision, service objectives and terms of reference. The draft Charter has been considered by CNPA Management Team to ensure it complies with CNPA's corporate approach to service standards. Following approval by the Planning Committee, the Charter will be distributed and published on our website.

Service Priorities for 2015/16

10. The Operational Plan considered by the Board set out six areas of work with planned operational budget and estimated staff involvement as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

	Planned operational budget	Estimated staff involvement	Estimated cost of staff involvement
	£	(FTE)	£
PRIORITY 1 - PLANNING			
Planning service	83,850	3.0	142,200
Service improvement	5,000	0.6	27,600
Best value review	-	0.4	18,400
LDP1	10,000	1.4	64,200
LDP2/NPPP3	5,000	1.4	64,300
Development management	-	7.8	357,700
	103,850	14.6	674,400

11. This paper concerns the Service Improvement area of work and therefore should be seen in the context of the other work concerning ongoing management of the Planning Service (involving legal advice, e-planning, etc), implementation of the considerations of the Best Value Review, work to deliver the recently adopted LDP and development management. During the year a considerable amount work is required to prepare for the next National Park Partnership Plan and Local Development Plan (2020 onwards) and on other priority projects (e.g. dualling of A9). Resource allocations have been made on that basis.
12. The proposed Service Improvements for 2015/16 are shown in Table 3. The new improvements have been discussed within the staff team and, in general terms, with the Planning Representatives Network and the Developers Forum. The proposed improvements are based on the real issues the Service needs to address in consolidating the period of change through to 2016. The relevant four priorities have been carried over from last year and the team will also ensure that the partially-completed actions are fully implemented.
13. In addition, a formal audit is due to take place of the Planning Service in May-June 2015 and there will be a need to consider any recommendations arising from that process within the year. The conclusions will be reported to Audit Committee and Planning Committee in due course.

Table 3:

Proposed 2015/16 Planning Service improvements	
1	Undertake feedback exercise with Community Council/Association Planning Representatives Network (PRN) on recent LDP process to improve ease of engagement for next LDP
2	Establish plan for Enforcement Officer role from July 2015
3	Undertake skills audit of planning team and establish a prioritised training/enhancement plan, including training activities on natural heritage skills and advice, delivery of the new LDP for the Park, and planning support team training on Uniform administration and template modification
4	Put in place procedure for CNPA member involvement in pre-application discussions
5	Enter Scottish Government/RTPI Awards for Quality in Planning
6	Investigate establishment of Design Panel for the Park
7	Review internal consultation procedures for specialist advice
8	Plan for Cairngorms Design Awards competition in 2016 to coincide with the themed year on Innovation, Architecture and Design
9	Add to series of Cairngorms Planning Advice Notes to provide easy to read customer-focussed advice
10	Implementation of a Scottish Government Pilot Project to use a new Town Centre Toolkit to improve the town centre vitality and viability

Next steps

14. Once the service improvements are approved, staff will incorporate them into the Planning Service Unit Plan for the year and into individual's work plans. The Committee will receive a comprehensive PPF report covering planning service performance with last year's improvement priorities once all the statistics and information needed is available and before the formal PPF report is sent to Scottish Government in July. It is proposed that a short paper summarising progress with the service improvements is brought to Committee in December 2015.

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