

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: Planning Service Improvement Plan

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Purpose:

To consider a package of measures to improve the overall Planning Service provided by CNPA in the form of a Service Improvement Plan for the period 2012 - 2014.

Recommendation

To approve the Service Improvement Plan 2012 -2014 which will be forwarded to Scottish Government and implemented by Management Team through specific project management arrangements associated with the Corporate Plan.

Background

1. On 28 March 2012 Derek Mackay, the Minister for Local Government and Planning, made a statement to the Scottish Parliament setting out the Scottish Government's proposals for future reform of the planning system to help the planning system reach its potential in supporting economic recovery. The emphasis is on non-legislative measures but legislative changes will be brought forward where necessary. The key priorities for the next stages of planning modernisation are:
 - a) promoting the plan-led system
 - b) driving improved performance
 - c) simplifying and streamlining processes
 - d) delivering development
2. In association with this statement a new Performance Management Framework was launched by Heads of Planning Scotland, setting out very clearly what a "high quality planning service" should look like and how it will be assessed. The Framework provides an excellent basis for our work on service improvement.

What work have we done already?

3. CNPA has already undertaken considerable work on planning service improvement over the last three years. An interim review of implementation of the last Service Improvement Plan (2011/12) was presented to the Committee in December 2011. Overall, good progress had been made, as summarised in **Annex I**. We are confident that the improvements made are resulting in better relationships with key stakeholders and a more positive role for our Planning Service in delivering the aims of the Park.

Preparation of the Service Improvement Plan 2012 -14

4. To discuss the service improvements required we brought together all the staff associated with planning process in a special, independently-facilitated “Planning Summit” in mid-April. Convener of Planning Committee attended, and we had very useful contributions from Director of Planning at Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority.
5. We used, as a basis for discussions, Part 2 of the new Performance Framework which sets out eight keys areas of activity that need to be addressed. The results were then reviewed with planning colleagues and other staff. We also consulted with staff from the five local authorities as part of our review of the Planning Protocol. We discussed our general ideas around Service Improvement with Developers’ Forum in mid-May and invited feedback. And we consulted with the new network of community council/association planning representatives about how we could work together better.
6. The Draft Service Improvement Plan is set out in **Annex 2**. In considering the Plan for approval please note that some work is still required to draw out the highlights in achievements to date and the scheduling of activity over the plan period.

Implementation and reporting progress

7. Formal project management arrangements are being put in place which will involve Convener of Planning Committee on the Project Board. It is proposed that interim review of progress is tabled in December 2012 and April 2013.

Cairngorms National Park Authority
June 2012

Annex 1: Summary of progress made with implementation of Service Improvement Plan 2011/2012

Of the 23 individual actions agreed in the Plan:

1. **15 actions have been completed.** Highlights include:
 - a) Four community-focused training events took place
 - b) Developer Forum established to follow-on from the four Planning Service workshop held earlier in 2011
 - c) Schools initiative about planning has been launched in conjunction with Planning Aid Scotland
 - d) Customer feedback system is now in place on CNPA website
 - e) Consultation feedback on the LDP Main Issues Report was independently analysed
 - f) Sustainable Design Award has been agreed and is ready for launch
 - g) Design Advisory Panel is now in place
 - h) Local Development Plan is available on-line as part of E-Planning Programme
 - i) Electronic approach to “call in” system has been reviewed and improved
 - j) Network of Community Council Planning Reps established
 - k) Head of Planning now has delegated authority to refuse applications due to lack of information
 - l) Discussion has taken place about shared approach to enforcement but some local authorities are not keen to progress further at this time – we will continue to explore this.

2. **Six actions have seen some progress made but are not quite completed/ resolved:**
 - a) Planning arrangements: Discussions are ongoing with partner local authorities about planning arrangements in National Park and how we can be more effective.
 - b) Improve standards of design: Some discussion has taken place with developer community, especially about the Sustainable Design Award, but we need to consolidate this work.
 - c) E-planning system for development management: Considerable work undertaken and programmed for phased introduction from July 2012.
 - d) Joint work with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NPA regarding policy development: We have some strands of joint work in place (esp. regarding renewable policy and permitted development) but there are opportunities to develop this work further.
 - e) Improve availability of statistics on planning: Some statistics are available online as part of work on Local Development Plan and basic planning performance statistics are now available online but presentation needs improved to facilitate ease of access and presentation of the role the planning plays in the managing the Park. National standardisation of this information is under way but special allowance will be required to cater for our unique “call-in” arrangements.

- f) Energy savings initiative for prospective planning applicants: This is being investigated with Energy Savings Trust and is likely to be taken forwards as part of Programme on Low Carbon Cairngorms in Partnership Plan.

3. Two actions have seen little or no progress:

- a) Information on the CNPA website about planning has not been substantially improved.
- b) E-planning system has not yet been widely promoted to public – Development management e-planning system is not yet functional and promotion of the system can only follow.

Annex 2: Draft Service Improvement Plan

Introduction

1. This Planning Service Improvement Plan reports on our achievements for the previous year and presents our planned improvements. The aim of the Plan is to demonstrate how we are improving our planning service to meet the government's aspiration of Planning Reform and our service to customers. The scope of the Plan covers all aspects of planning process including development plans, development management and enforcement. The Service Improvement Plan sits alongside our Development Plan Scheme which sets out how we will prepare the new Local Development Plan.

Background

2. The overarching strategic context for the planning in the National Park is provided by the National Park Partnership Plan which is prepared by CNPA as specified in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 and is based on the four statutory aims of the Park. The Partnership Plan sets out the strategic vision and overarching strategy for managing the Park and provides the strategic context for the Local Development Plan. All public bodies are required to have "due regard" to the Park Partnership Plan. These special arrangements make us different from a Local Planning Authority.
3. The planning arrangements in the Cairngorms National Park are unique in Scotland and are based on a partnership approach between Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) and the five local authorities.
4. CNPA is required to prepare one or more Local (Development) Plans for the area. The Local Plan was adopted in October 2010 and covers all of the Park, except Perth and Kinross which is covered by a separate Local Plan – this is due to the Park boundary extension which also took place in October 2010. Work is well under way on preparation of one Local Development Plan for the Park which is due for formal consultation process in spring 2013 with a view to adoption in 2014. Further details is in Development Plan Scheme on our website.
5. CNPA is the planning authority with respect to the preparation of the Local Development Plan and for those planning applications which it decides to "call-in" for determination and for subsequent actions. Applications are called in if they raise "...a planning issue of general significance to the National Park aims" (CNP Designation Order, 2003). Those applications that are not "called-in" are dealt with by the local authorities in line with the relevant Local Plan. A protocol is in place between CNPA and the five local authorities to set out how the detailed processes work.

6. Within the National Park the Planning Service is high profile, frequently featuring in the local press and sometime capturing national media attention. Due to the nature of the planning process the decisions made are frequently controversial and attract comment from individuals and interested parties. It is imperative that all aspects of our Planning Service are well thought-through and presented, that our planning processes are efficient and effective and that our communications work is proactive and well-developed.

Summary of key achievements

7. In summary, our key achievements in the past year have been:
 - Improved Service performance and efficiency – including improved electronic call-in process and lower active case-log.
 - Enhanced customer engagement – including Developers Forum, new customer feedback system and establishment of Community Representatives Network.
 - Integration of the planning service with our wider work on sustainable development – including interaction with community action planning and schools inactive about planning.
 - Measures to raise design standards – including new Sustainable Design Awards and Design Advice Panel.

Forward Plan for 2012 -14

8. The issues and actions are structured under eight areas of activity which define a “high quality planning service” from Part 2 of the Planning Performance Framework. [Timescales to be developed through Project Plan]

1) Open for Business

Key Cairngorms issues:

1. Ensuring that the planning process plays a positive role in encouraging and facilitating a sustainable economy, supporting thriving businesses, communities and affordable housing
2. Getting off to the best possible start with discussions about any proposal (i.e. pre-application discussions) so that key planning issues are addressed early-on
3. Maintaining and developing good relations with key regular applicants and their agents so that we get better outcomes

Actions:

- a) Assist Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP) to lead the formation of an Economic Forum and preparation of Economic Diversification Strategy for the Park

- b) Consolidate the Developers Forum and make sure it is worthwhile for all concerned so that key relationships are built and that developers/agents/architects etc are very well involved in the development of policy and how it is implemented
- c) Prepare a Planning Concordat with CBP as a joint statement of commitment setting out roles and responsibilities of applicants, planning authority and wider business community
- d) Further develop the Housing Enabler service we provide in partnership with local authorities
- e) Improve internal systems to ensure very close working arrangements with economic development and other specialist staff in CNPA

2) High quality Development on the Ground

Key Cairngorms issues:

- 1. Improving standards of design in applications coming forwards
- 2. Focus proactive attention on particular parts of the Park
- 3. Better and earlier engagement and information sharing with key environmental NGOs

Actions:

- a) Move forwards the place-specific initiatives (e.g. in Aviemore and in Cairngorms Rothiemurchus and Glenmore area) and ensure they influence standards of development
- b) Judge and celebrate the Sustainable Design Awards
- c) Design Advisory Panel in place and working well
- d) Initiative to promote earlier and more positive environmental NGO engagement with planning process
- e) Produce and promote more visual illustrations of good design in the Park – linked to the Design Awards

3) Certainty

Key Cairngorms issues:

- 1. Ensure that our approach to providing specialist advice is timely, proportionate and positive.
- 2. Ensure that CNPA staff and Board members are well-informed and well-aligned about our planning policy and get out more to see how it affects planning determinations on the ground
- 3. Providing clarity about what standard is expected in planning applications

Actions:

- a) Consult on draft Local Development Plan and full set of Supplementary Planning Guidance at the same time to allow consultees to see whole picture
- b) Implement system of process agreements for major applications
- c) Undertake habitat surveys for all proposed allocated sites in the Local Development Plan
- d) Develop a pre-application initiative with partner local authorities to ensure we have the best possible pre-application discussions (involving staff training, new work procedures, a new procedural note and enhanced management scrutiny)
- e) Review and agree existing protocol with SNH
- f) Review and simplify the Development Appraisal Toolkit
- g) Extend the Member Development Programme and include key staff and partners

4) Communications, Engagement and Customer Service

Key Cairngorms issues:

1. Improve presentation of the planning process, the role it plays in managing the Park and the progress being made
2. More emphasis on the promoting innovative activities that we do already, especially around stakeholder engagement improving CNPA website on planning issues
3. Enhanced availability of planning staff in west of the Park
4. More focus on collaborative work with community councils/associations

Actions:

- a) Develop communications plan, as part of Communications and Engagement Strategy, to clarify the messages, processes, stories and statistics required
- b) Review and improve of planning section of CNPA website
- c) Implement e-planning system for development management
- d) Development of Planning Charter to set out customer standards
- e) Establish new network of planning representatives from community councils and associations to work alongside Community Liaison Officers
- f) Meet with two of the CNP Advisory Forums per year to promote wider discussion about role of Planning in the achievement of NP vision
- g) Review and improve recently launched schools engagement programme about planning in the Park
- h) Improve staff availability in west of the Park

- i) Produce short update every year on implementation of Local (Development) Plan and associated work.

5) Efficient and Effective Decision Making

Key Cairngorms issues:

1. Simplify and streamline “call in” process
2. Making sure process and procedure at Committee meetings is as effective as possible
3. Being more proactive about dealing with delayed cases

Actions:

- a) Delegate responsibility to Head Planner to take the majority of “call in” decisions
- b) Review of Planning Report format to make shorter and to focus more on appraisal section
- c) Improve Committee procedures (including review of Standing Orders) to shorten time available for representations, address site visits, shorten planning papers and promote use of video and other images

6) Effective Management Structures

Key Cairngorms issues:

1. Making sure that our unique planning arrangements in the Cairngorms National Park are fit for purpose and in line with planning reform
2. Making sure that we adequately resource our planning team and the necessary wider work

Actions:

- a) Keep under review our partnership approach to planning arrangements with local authorities
- b) Review resources required in Planning Team and benchmark, as far as we are able, with other planning authorities in relation to “call-in” processes, administration support and travel to and from Ballater

7) Financial Management and Local Governance

Key Cairngorms issues:

1. Programme Managers and allocation of resources across staff teams
2. Improve procedures for decisions about financial allocation and staff resources at Inquiries which can carry significant staff and legal costs

Actions:

- a) Improve process for decisions about when and how to feed into Inquiries
- b) Implement new Programme Manager arrangements to improve cross-team working

8) Culture of Continuous Improvement

Key issues to address:

- 1. Developing and fostering a helpful and proactive culture to assist with development delivery
- 2. Consolidating the service improvements already made so they become part of our normal practice
- 3. Continued development of an innovative, progressive and imaginative in our approach to our planning service

Actions:

- a) Key staff to participate in the significant training initiative to be run by Improvement Service on “Better outcomes for planning” on planning and economic development
- b) Enhanced training initiative for Board and key staff on planning and economic development

CNPA
June 2012