

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

**Title: PLANNING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN
2011/12**

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1. The purpose of the paper is to summarise the improvements we have made to our Planning Service in the last six months and plan a further series of improvements in 2011/12.
2. **Recommendations:**
 - **Note** the progress we have made with implementation of the Planning Service Improvement Plan and the feedback we have received as result of Planning Service Workshops.
 - **Approve** the Service Improvement Plan (SIP) for 2011/12 (see Annex D) and delegate responsibility for implementation to Management Team.

3. **Background**

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 planning elsewhere in Scotland, it is frequently contentious with the controversies often reported in the media. Therefore, the way in which we deliver the Planning Service impacts to a considerable degree on how CNPA and the National Park generally is perceived by the public.

The planning system balances different interests to make sure that land is used and developed in a way that creates high quality, sustainable places. The customers that benefit from our Planning Service are very varied and include applicants for planning permission, objectors, planning agents, neighbours, public bodies, communities and businesses. In order to provide the best possible service to these customers it is important that we develop a culture of service improving which invites feedback, reflects on what we are told and puts in place a range of proactive and creative measures that benefit our customers.

Like other planning authorities in Scotland we have agreed to submit a Service Improvement Plan to Scottish Government annually. The Planning Committee approved the last Service Improvement Plan in November 2010.

4. Progress report on SIP 2010/11

We have made considerable progress in implementing the approved Service Improvement Plan. Of the 20 specified actions, which were grouped into in the seven key areas for improvement, we have completed 11 action, made substantial progress against a further 5 and made no, or very little, progress against 4 actions.

| Actions: Key areas: | Completed | Substantial Progress | No progress | Total |
|--|-----------|-------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| 1. A user-oriented Service | 2 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| 2. Strengthened role for Planning service in achieving Sustainable Rural Development | 3 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| 3. Changes to "call in" procedure | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 4. Joint work with local authorities | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| 5. Enforcement activity | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| 6. E-planning | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 7. Determination rates of applications | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| TOTAL | 11 | 5 | 4 | 20 |

A full progress report is provided in **Annex A**. Amongst the highlights the Committee should note:

- Four Planning Service Workshops were held in March 2010. A summary of feedback received is in **Annex B** (section 5 is especially useful). The full report of the feedback received at the workshops is available on the CNPA website.
- A programme of training and development for communities was planned with community liaison officers (completed during early June 2011).
- Planning Committee has undertaken development activity and a forward plan for further such activity is in place.
- Online Development Plan (part of the E-Planning Project) is now available.
- Substantial new efforts have been made to meet target timescales for determination and the backlog of applications has been significantly reduced.
- 2010/11 saw the first year of formal Service Level Agreement regarding Planning Gain services by Aberdeenshire Council.

We have not managed to make as much progress as we hoped in the following areas, largely due to pressures on staff time because of competing priorities. All of these will be taken forwards into the next Service Improvement Plan:

- Joint work with local authorities: One protocol meeting involving all five authorities and Scottish Government took place during the year but we have not yet been able to develop the modified protocol.
- Enforcement activity: While preliminary discussions about shared services approach have taken place we have not managed to follow through. The priority area for discussions is with Highland Council.
- Delegation of authority to refuse applications due to lack of information.
- Sustainable Design Award. We have undertaken an initial scoping exercise and had discussion with MT as part of wider consideration of design issues. (A paper on design issues will be presented to Committee in June).

Recommendation:

Note the progress we have made with implementation of the Planning Service Improvement Plan and the feedback we have received as result of Planning Service Workshops.

5. Service Improvement Plan for 2011/12

In considering the SIP for 2011/12 the following factors should be noted:

Integration with Operational Plan:

At present our SIP timetable is out of step with our operational planning timetable. This presents problems, especially in terms of deployment of staff resources, and the system would work better if we drew up the SIP annually as part of each round of operational planning. For this reason we anticipate the next SIP will be developed in November – December 2011 for approval as part of the operational plan.

Structure and content:

We propose that our Service improvements are grouped around the broadly same key areas as we used previously with the following changes:

- addition of community councils/associations to the key area concerning joint work with local authorities and much greater focus on working with and through these structures.

- addition of one new key area relating to joint work with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NPA on planning policy.
- We have not included in the Plan those actions which we are obliged to undertake (e.g. Review and update of Development Plan scheme) or which are already in the approved Corporate Plan.
- In developing the actions we have given particular attention to proactive communications and engagement with communities and interest groups to raise their awareness of, and engagement with, the planning system. A brief review of the four community-focused events (held in June 2011) is presented at **Annex C**.

Implementation:

Cross-organisational commitment and support is required, supported through leadership from Management Team. Implementation of the SIP will be considered alongside implementation of 2011/12 Operational Plan and 2008/12 Corporate Plan, and will also be integrated into other appropriate delivery mechanisms (management group meetings and Programme Team meetings).

Resources:

Management team have confirmed that we have resources available to deliver the actions identified within the year. It would not be possible to significantly add to the list of actions or accelerate timescales without changing other priorities.

Recommendation:

Approve the Service Improvement Plan (SIP) for 2011/12 (see Annex D) and delegate responsibility for implementation to Management Team.

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- Annex A: Progress report on SIP 2010/11
Annex B: Summary Report of Planning Service Workshop run by Planning Aid Scotland (full report available on CNPA website)
Annex C: Review of Planning Awareness Sessions
Annex D: Key actions and areas for SIP 2011/12 (for approval)

**Annex A:
Progress on Key areas for Service Improvement 2010 - 2011**

A user-oriented service:

| | Timescale |
|---|------------------|
| 1. Convene a Planning Service Feedback Forum for developers, agents, community councils, amenity organisations, agency representatives and other interested parties to encourage feedback about our Planning Service. Feedback from this Forum will assist in preparing future Service Improvement Plans. | By February 2011 |
| <i>Four Planning Service Workshops were held in March 2011 in Aviemore and Ballater facilitated by Planning Aid Scotland. Summary of feedback is in Appendix B. This will contribute to the SIP for 2011-12.</i> | |
| 2. Prepare a programme of planning training for communities and other interested parties | By March 2011 |
| <i>Programme prepared by March 2011 and Community Awareness events held in Newtonmore, Nethybridge, Braemar and Blair Atholl in early June 2011.</i> | |
| 3. 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 |
| <i>Information leaflet has been drafted to convey information with technical accuracy, language has been independently reviewed/ revised, and it is being tested via Community Awareness events prior to publication. SPG and pre-application discussions being promoted via leaflet and website.</i> | |
| 4. Review the planning information on the CNPA website and the language used in official correspondence to make sure it is customer friendly. | By March 2011 |
| <i>Redrafting has taken place and language being independently reviewed. Templates for official correspondence have had to be altered to fit with new e planning/OPIS system hosted by Loch Lomond and Trossachs NPA – work underway through June 2011 to make this “live” in July.</i> | |

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

| | Timescale |
|---|------------------|
| 1. Prepare plans, with partners, for a Sustainable Design Award scheme for the National Park. | By March 2011 |
| <i>We have investigated existing models for Design Awards (e.g. Aberdeenshire Council) and had discussion with Management Team. Discussion due with Committee in June 2011.</i> | |
| 2. Improve our capability to collate and analyse planning related data through development of a work-stream dedicated to this function | By December 2010 |
| <i>We have improved our case management systems for planning applications, and are introducing a new e-planning package, all of which make it easier to manage and access data. A new post has been created within CNPA specifically to co-ordinate and handle data, statistics and other evidence base for the Local Development Plan, National Park Plan, Development Management and other aspects of the Authority's activities.</i> | |
| 3. Approve for consultation a further batch of Supplementary Planning Guidance | By February 2011 |
| <i>Following the adoption of the first suite of SPG in October 2010, a further tranche was published for consultation early in 2011 and the results of that consultation will be considered by the Planning Committee in July 2011 along with suggested revisions to allow the SPG to be adopted.</i> | |
| 4. Review and Update the Development Plan Scheme | By March 2011 |
| <i>The DPS for 2011 has been adopted by the Planning Committee.</i> | |
| 5. Draw up a structured programme of development activity for the Planning Committee involving site visits and sessions on particular topics | By February 2011 |
| <i>Following a field trip on 28 April 2011 looking at some past decisions on the ground, the Planning Committee considered a report at the meeting on 27 May 2011 reflecting on this event and considering other development activity for the year, giving priority to design, planning obligations/planning gain and renewable energy schemes.</i> | |

Changes to “Call-in” procedure

| | Timescale |
|---|------------------|
| 1. Finish the ongoing trial arrangements for the new electronic “call-in” system and review Committee meeting schedule accordingly | By January 2011 |
| <i>Following a trial period the Planning Committee in March 2011 agreed to move to electronic call-in. The process has now become established routine to be reviewed within 6 months.</i> | |

Joint working with local authorities

| | Timescale |
|---|------------------|
| 1. Agree revised Protocol for planning with partner local authorities | By February 2011 |
| <i>It was agreed with the local authorities in autumn 2010 that the existing development management protocol required revision/expansion to cover development planning, greater explanation of how enforcement works in the Park, and offer clarity on responsibilities for housing. Other pressures of work have delayed progress, but this is now an absolute priority and work is under way.</i> | |
| 2. Make special efforts to work closely with Perth and Kinross Council who are new to the National Park | By March 2011 |
| <i>With part of Perth & Kinross coming into the Park in October 2010 it was necessary to establish a close relationship with the Council. Contacts were established well in advance and there is a good ongoing relationship and understanding with colleagues in Perth & Kinross Council.</i> | |

Enforcement activity:

| | Timescale |
|---|------------------|
| 1. Publish and distribute the Enforcement Charter | By November 2010 |
| <i>Enforcement Charter now published, distributed and available on the CNPA website. The Monitoring and Enforcement Officer will be bringing a report to the Planning Committee during the year with a review of activity and the operation of the Charter.</i> | |
| 2. Initiate discussions on a shared services approach to enforcement across the National Park in conjunction with relevant local authorities | By February 2011 |
| <i>There had previously been informal discussion with two of the Councils on the potential for a shared enforcement service and some interest had been expressed at officer level. Since taking up post the CNPA Monitoring and Enforcement Officer has been busy establishing the function within the authority and it was then the intention to have more formal dialogue with the Councils on a shared services approach. This has not yet taken place, but with the revisions needed to the Protocol and the impact of the prevailing financial climate for all planning authorities, it is considered that this is a priority for 2011-12.</i> | |

E-planning:

| | Timescale |
|--|------------------|
| 1. Make the Online Development Plan available | By March 2011 |
| <i>This has now been done for the Local Plan and is hosted by Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NPA. The process for the Local Development Plan will use the same OLDP system.</i> | |
| 2. Make the Online Planning Information System live – to show same information online as other planning authorities in Scotland | By March 2011 |
| <i>This is being hosted by Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NPA which already has a Uniform E-Planning System. We have been working with LLTNPA since early 2010 and it has taken a little longer than anticipated to incorporate the CNPA development management system, including “call-in”, and making this fit with LLTNPA who have full planning powers. Issues have now been addressed and LLTNPA staff are currently installing and testing the OPIS system at CNPA through June 2011. It should be complete by the end of the June and we will then run the new and old systems in tandem for a short time until all testing has taken place and the OPIS is fully operational.</i> | |

Determination rate of applications

| | Timescale |
|---|------------------|
| 1. Conduct further discussions with relevant local authorities about the importance of the validation stage so that applications can be dealt with more effectively. | By February 2011 |
| <i>Discussion has taken place and will be formally incorporated in the revised Protocol. The wider discussions between Scottish Government, planning authorities and the development sector have stressed the importance of competent applications to improve the effectiveness of the planning system. The adopted Local Plan and SPG along with more pre-application discussion will all contribute to effectiveness.</i> | |
| 2. Investigate the benefits of delegation of authority to refuse applications due to lack of information to Head of Development Management | By February 2011 |
| <i>This has yet to be taken forward but, with the adopted Local Plan and SPG in place, prospective developers should now submit applications that contain all of the necessary information. Previously CNPA planning officers have devoted a significant amount of time and energy trying to secure all of the necessary information on various aspects of a planning application in order to bring it forward for determination. It is intended to bring a report to Planning Committee in the near future setting out the circumstances in which it should be delegated to the Head Planner to refuse planning permission due to lack of information.</i> | |
| 3. 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 |
| <i>Within the constraints of the “call-in” process this has been achieved. The overall caseload in hand has been brought down to no more than 20 applications at any point in time (it had been up to 50) and applications are being brought to Planning Committee as soon as all information is available. We have established a protocol for provision of advice from internal CNPA specialists to enhance effectiveness and we are working with external consultees to ensure faster responses. It must be pointed out that the quarterly returns to Scottish Government are presented in a table that takes no account of the time taken up by the “call-in” process. This has been raised with</i> | |

| | |
|---|-------------------------|
| <p><i>Scottish Government, but they are not prepared to change the format for one authority – we are allowed to submit a commentary to explain our unique situation.</i></p> | |
| <p>4. Publish key planning performance statistics on our website including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) proportion of planning applications in the Park that are “called in” b) proportion of approvals/refusals c) determination rate of applications | <p>By February 2011</p> |
| <p><i>This work is in hand. We have been waiting for the completion of the OPIS installation, which will help with generation of statistics, and the revision to website format and content. This information will appear regularly from summer 2011.</i></p> | |

**Annex B: Summary Report of Planning Service Workshop run by
Planning Aid Scotland (full report available on CNPA website)**

Annex C: Feedback on the Planning Awareness Sessions

4 June in Newtonmore /Nethybridge and 11 June in Braemar/Blair Atholl

Purpose of sessions

The sessions came out of feedback from various consultations : (National park Plan review, Our Community a Way Forward and the recent evaluations of the CNPA planning service) Where it was clear that there are high levels of mis-information on planning and housing issues, as well as gaps in knowledge on both areas. The sessions included presentations from Alison Lax and Andrew Tait that covered planning policy development, implementation and enforcement. The sessions were supported by the Community Liaison Agencies (REAP, VABS and MAP) who chaired the sessions and helped to promote the events. Officers from local authorities (housing and planning) were also in attendance.

What was useful?

- Local Authority and CNPA staff being seen to respond to local residents in a more joined-up fashion. Feedback from local authorities was that they thought the session were very useful.
- Feedback from the communities themselves on how the CNPA should engage with them on planning issues (particularly the main issues report in the autumn)in the future. Able to highlight the importance of communities engaging with the LDP (when they can influence the process and when they cannot).
- Those that attended left better informed on planning and housing issues, even those that thought they had higher levels of understanding felt they learnt new things.
- Clear that we have to be more creative in engaging with communities around the long term development in their local area.
- Using the Community Liaison Officers to chair and facilitate the sessions helped – the standard of facilitation was very high.

What was not useful?

- Low turn out from the communities Newtonmore 6, Nethybridge 16, Braemar 7, Blair Atholl 4. In addition there was representation from planning and housing officers from the Highland Council, Perth & Kinross Council, Aberdeenshire Council and the Small Communities Housing Trust. CNPA staff and Board members were also in attendance.
- High percentage of attendance by people with whom we were already in contact and the challenge of reaching new audiences.
- Amount of (CNPA and partner) staff time dedicated to sessions that were poorly attended.

Recommendations/Actions

- More engagement with individual community councils/associations from the planners to raise awareness on planning issues. But, over a longer period of time, “bite sized training”
- Review our approach to engaging on the Local Development Plan in the autumn. Take the LDP/NPP2 consultation to the community councils/Associations. Use them to encourage others to get involved.
- Future engagement has to be carried out in a way which reflects the resources we have available and is balanced with other priorities that are placed upon the planning service.

Immediate proposed actions:

- Mairi MacDonald and Claire Ross to update Community Council Data base: with key contacts and dates of meetings .Encourage CCs to have a planning rep, ask how they want to be consulted on planning issues.
- Meeting set for the 11th of July to work out the detail of a more proactive approach to consulting on the Npp2/LDP
- Use the resource of the Community Liaison Agents to support the community councils/associations, their local constituencies and other stakeholders to engage more fully in the forthcoming consultations.

Claire Ross
June 2011

Annex D: Key actions and areas for Service Improvement Plan 2011/12

Proposed actions for 2011/12 are described under each heading:

- I. A user-oriented Service
 - a. Discuss with partners the benefits and costs of CNPA becoming full planning authority.
 - b. Deliver four community-focussed events, undertake post-event review and plan follow-on events or approach for the next 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.
 - d. Arrange independent analysis of the feedback received through consultation on the Local Development Plan Main Issues Report.
 - e. As part of refreshed the new CNP website (due June 2011) provide clearer information about planning service and promote active engagement.
 - f. Develop a system to capture feedback about Development Management and Enforcement service on a routine basis using internet based service (ie using Survey Monkey or similar).

2. Strengthened role for 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 (see separate paper at June Planning Committee).
 - b. Deliver, and keep under review, a structured programme of development activity for Planning Committee, including field visits to see issues on the ground.
 - c. Investigate development of an energy saving information initiative for prospective planning applicants (with Energy Savings Trust or similar).
 - d. Pilot a stream of work with Planning Aid Scotland to promote awareness of Planning process amongst young people and in schools.

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

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)
 - b. Offer to meet with at least half of Community Councils annually to discuss Planning Service and how it can be improved
 - c. Develop a network of Planning Contacts in each Community Council and share best practice.

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

6. E-planning
 - a. Implement E-planning information system for planning applications (by end July)
 - b. Promote online Development Plan (which is already available for Local Plan) and implement of for Local Development Plan
 - c. Publicise availability of E-planning system to promote greater involvement in planning process.

7. Determination rates of applications
 - a. Arrange for delegation of authority to refuse applications to Head Planner
 - b. Publish key planning performance statistics on CNP portal once launched.

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 SPG)