
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY PLANNING COMMITTEE

FOR DECISION

Title: DESIGN MATTERS

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Purpose

This paper seeks the Planning Committee's agreement to a proposed programme of work on design issues within the Cairngorms National Park.

Recommendation

That the Planning Committee;

- a) Agree the proposed programme for Design related work over the coming months as part of the Service Improvement Plan,
- b) Agree the proposed way forward for the Aviemore Design Framework and creation of associated member/staff task and finish group.

Executive Summary

Design has always been a central issue in the consideration of planning applications in the Park, but the quality of design seen has varied considerably. This paper sets out a programme of work (to be incorporated within the Service Improvement Plan) that seeks to improve on the current situation, by involving all those who have a role to play in delivering good design. The proposals include a programme of training and awareness raising, scoping out how best to involve those who make design happen on the ground, including the formation of a design panel for the park, and finally investigating the details of a design award for the Park in the future. The paper also sets out proposals for taking forward the ongoing work on design in Aviemore.

Design Matters in the Cairngorms National Park

1. Design has always been a central issue in the consideration of planning applications in the Park. Buildings are a key component of the Park's landscape; they are not separate from it. They have the potential to make a positive contribution and improve landscape quality. They have potential to detract from landscape and diminish its quality. We live and work in buildings. So their success or otherwise affects our physical and emotional well-being.
2. People do have individual tastes, but good quality design shares a number of attributes:
 - Siting in relation to land form – reflecting and working with the grain of the land
 - Siting in relation to existing buildings – reflecting traditional layout
 - Proportions – width to height ratio, roof pitches, size/orientation of openings
 - Proportions in relation to existing buildings – reflecting traditional building form
 - Use of materials that reflect the place
 - Fit for purpose – including ensuring buildings are efficient to reflect changing environmental standards and energy costs
3. Most of us know when something is “right” because it hits these buttons (or bullet points). It is almost subliminal. It does not mean that we need to slavishly build more of the what we have already; there is scope for the traditional and the contemporary. The challenge is to articulate it to help deliver the building design that the Park needs and deserves.
4. Scottish Government has been raising the profile of good design for some time through a variety of Planning Advice Notes (Designing Places/Streets, Masterplanning). CNPA is now at a point where the Local Plan and Sustainable Design Guide give us the basic tools we need to develop a more structured approach to design, both in terms of planning decisions and developing wider awareness and understanding by all involved in the planning process – including applicants, Committee Members and staff.
5. The quality and appropriateness of building design coming forward since the Park came into being has been variable, ranging from well-conceived “one-off” houses that reflect their location, to larger developments with little sense of place, and at the other end of the spectrum, the completely inappropriate. In the past we have spent a lot of time working on the middle category to try and achieve a positive outcome. Officers have arguably spent too much time on the latter when a swift refusal would have been appropriate. It is critical that the proposals coming forward reflect the Park and make a positive contribution to it.
6. We now have a robust basis on which to make decisions about design. Policy 18 in the Local Plan and the associated Sustainable Design Guide clearly set out our

expectations in terms of design in the Park and this should give them greater confidence about how they stand the best possible chance of a successful application. We now need to take these words forward and help develop a more integrated approach to design, bringing together all those with an interest and role in terms of design in the Park to help develop a shared understanding and commitment to improve the overall standards of design seen in the Park. Good quality, sustainable and affordable design should contribute towards the special qualities of the National Park, and to ensure this is the case, a focus on design matters over the coming year is called for, drawing on the good practice and good work that has gone before, but increasing our expectations for all future developments.

7. The Planning Committee Site Visits on 28 April 2011 were interesting and the quality of discussion on a wide variety of design issues demonstrates how seriously design is taken here in the Park. Engaging with building design on the ground, appreciating the importance of the detailed execution of a proposal, and discussing the merits of particular buildings and in some cases expressing an appreciation of good architectural quality even though it may not be to an individual's personal taste, all highlighted the factors that need to be considered in terms of all consideration of design.

Programme of design matters June 2011-March 2012

8. Having set the context, and in order to take forward a considered and integrated approach to improving the quality of design in the Park, a programme of work over the forthcoming year is proposed. This will bring together Members, staff, local architects, designers, and builders / craftspeople. The final details of this programme will be brought back to you in due course for you to agree, but will include discussion sessions, site visits and opportunities to create a shared understanding of what our existing design policies and guidance mean on the ground in the Park.
9. Specific elements of this programme, to be delivered as part of the Service Improvement Plan will be:
 - a) Arrange sessions on best practice in design for Members and staff (both CNPA and from the Local Authorities)– involving architects / local builders / developers and craftspeople.
 - b) 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.
 - c) 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.
 - d) Scope out proposals for establishing a Cairngorms National Park Design Award (see below).

Cairngorms National Park Design Awards

10. Design awards are a recognised way of celebrating good design in an area, to promote best practice and to engage, inspire and enthuse the general public about what is possible and what can be achieved.
11. What do we want to see in the CNP?
 - Sustainable design being recognised as a special quality of the CNP
 - Maintain existing distinctive character and innate special qualities of the Park and enhance these in the future
 - Development that achieves excellent environmental standards in order to help build resilience within individual buildings and communities to the effects of climate change / peak oil, and to mitigate against effects already being experienced
 - Make best of local traditions – often based on best available local people and materials, and ensure skills maintained and developed and linked into new and innovative technologies where it benefits all
 - Celebrate excellent design and workmanship by architects, designers, developers, builders, craftspeople
12. And why design awards?
 - To promote quality design in the Cairngorms National Park
 - To highlight best practice in the Cairngorms National Park specific setting
 - To support high standards of designing and building
13. Establishing Design awards in the Cairngorms National Park has been a long-standing aspiration of the CNPA, but various key building blocks needed to be in place before they could be looked at in more detail. Design awards were highlighted in the Service Improvement Plan for 2010-11 but we have not progressed beyond discussion at Management Team. Now we have established our adopted Local Plan with its design policy, and our Sustainable Design Guide, we are in a position to scope out the awards as part of the new Service Improvement Plan, ready for a launch in 2012-13.
14. This will be a culmination of all of our activity on design, from our policies, the Sustainable Design Guide, and the proposed programme of events / training during 2011-12.
15. Scoping out the awards will involve investigating options as to how the awards will be set up, what links can be made to neighbouring authorities, and other national

organisations' design awards, who will judge the awards, what categories will there be, what needs to be done to promote the awards, and finally, how the winners will be publicised and promoted to help take forward best practice in the National Park. All of these issues, and others, will be looked at, and further proposals about the details of the awards will be brought back to you for further consideration later in the year.

Recommendation

- a) Agree the proposed programme for Design related work over the coming year as part of the Service Improvement Plan,

Aviemore Design Framework

16. Recent discussions with Members about the Aviemore Design Framework (ADF) have made it clear that expectations about it would deliver have changed considerably since the work on it began. Whilst the detailed report put together by consultants has provided considerable information about Aviemore, and also suggested a wide variety of ideas for the whole of the area, it is clear that Members now want to see a more streamlined and targeted set of simple design criteria that can be applied throughout the settlement.
17. It is proposed to keep the consultants report as it is, and it can be used both internally, and by the community as a source of detailed information about the area. To take this forward in a more focused way, it is now proposed to set up a small member/officer task and finish group to consider the targeted design advice in the consultants report, and take this forward into a short and succinct series of design guidance for Aviemore. Much of the background to this guidance is contained in the consultant's report, but a short piece of work is required to pull out the key elements, and present it in a more user orientated fashion, so it can more easily be used by Members, staff, and the developers themselves.
18. This targeted guidance will not be adopted as formal supplementary planning guidance. We don't believe this is necessary as it will be clearly linked to the local plan policies and the Sustainable Design Guide, which already have a formal status.
19. It is envisaged that the task and finish group would meet three times over the next four months to lead this piece of work, the main bulk of the work would be undertaken by staff, with input from Members, and the group would be supported by staff. The group will carry out the work, including consideration of the nature and extent of consultation, and report back to the Planning Committee.

Recommendation

- b) Agree the proposed way forward for the Aviemore Design Framework and creation of associated member/staff task and finish group.

Conclusions

- 20. Design is an important issue in the Cairngorms National Park, and the proposed programme of work to be undertaken over the coming year should help to build momentum in terms of improving the overall quality of design in the National Park, whilst also working closely with those people who are key to making it happen.

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14 June 2011

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