

PLANNING PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK: 2012-13

FEEDBACK REPORT: Cairngorms National Park Authority



Date performance report due: 30 September 2013

Date of receipt of report: 30 September 2013

National Headline Indicators

- We recognise the position with adoption of your local plan in 2010 but also the impacts and uncertainty caused by ongoing and long-running legal challenges. We welcome however your progress with your LDP, which remains on track for adoption within the statutory 5-year cycle and which will consolidate the development plan for all areas within the national park.
- Information on housing and employment land supply noted. There remain some issues around a standard definition for consistently measuring employment and commercial land supply, which we are working with HOPS to address.
- We note your disappointment at the drop in your recorded pre-application involvement and the reasons behind this, although 43% of applications is a higher rate than many parts of the country. Even though the potential for your future involvement is uncertain at pre-application stage, we would encourage you to become involved in discussions wherever possible, and as appropriate, to support a degree of certainty and understanding of your interests and potential role. We support your plans to work with the local authorities in your area to review pre-application processes.
- We realise you have not yet entered into any processing agreements with applicants, but that you have taken some steps in preparation for their introduction. We look forward to following progress on this in your next report, in which you could also explain how you have promoted and publicised this. Although you tend not to deal with a large number of major applications, following recent legislative changes you could consider scope to use processing agreements for more substantial local developments.
- We note and welcome the greater certainty provided by the substantial increase in your approval rate from 80% last year to 94.1%, now a little above the national figure. You attribute this to better awareness of your policy and guidance, which is encouraging.
- Within the context of the park authority's circumstances for handling only called in applications, we do see some very encouraging improvement in decision-making timescales generally, particularly across non-householder local developments, which account for the vast majority of the applications you handle. You have recognised that there remains some scope to improve

further in this area and have committed actions on this for 2013-14. We look forward to following this.

- In relation to the one major development, we have noted the comments you made regarding the circumstances. We have noticed an inconsistency with the published official statistics though: you show this application as having been decided after 92 weeks, while the official statistics have the figure as a much higher 190.6 weeks; and also that it was subject to a legal agreement, which does not show in the Appendix I table in your report. It is important to ensure consistency with the published statistics, picking up any issues with the Scottish Government's Analytical Services as necessary.
- We welcome your continued annual review of your enforcement charter, while your statistics also show a good record on resolving planning breaches, including taking formal action where necessary.

Defining and measuring a high-quality planning service

- You have demonstrated good efforts to improve engagement and relationships with the local business community, and we note your authority's continuing improvement in the CBP's 'Business Barometer'. We would be interested in the reasons why you have not pursued the proposal for a Planning Concordat with the CBP. Your report could benefit in places from some practical examples from the year, such as a case study or feedback received that demonstrates how your relationship with business interests has helped to deliver important or priority development identified in your local plan.
- We welcome the inception of your design awards scheme and also your use of awards entries to produce cases studies on your website. This not only reflects the importance of your role in influencing quality development in the national park, but will also help to promote confidence and a degree of certainty among developers about the standards you expect.
- We note your comments about your decision not to pursue a design review panel for the park at this time, and the reasons for that decision; but also that you could perhaps bring this back onto the agenda once other improvements have been made to your service. Given quality of design is such an important matter for a national park, we hope you will be able to do this.
- Undoubtedly an up-to-date local plan contributes to the certainty valued by prospective developers and also by local communities. Your record of deciding applications in line with the plan, and all in line with officer recommendation, can also support this certainty and developer confidence in the process.
- We welcome your plans to work with stakeholders to produce clearer expectations of information and surveys to support applications, which can help to avoid further delays and costs down the line, and also your intention to provide clearer guidance on likely circumstances for call-in. We look forward to hearing more on this in future reports.
- We are pleased to see continuing improvements in community engagement, notably the successful introduction of a new network for community council planning representatives and also your involvement in the IMBY project.
- Your customer satisfaction survey has produced some reasonable results and endorsement for your service. We note the particular areas you have

highlighted as issues to address; while you are proposing a programme of work to improve timescales, it was less clear what the concerns were around the quality and effectiveness of your communications or what you may be doing to address these.

- You have been taking forward a range of important initiatives geared towards improving efficiency in application handling, including your proposals for restructuring the team, service delivery reviews with your partner local authorities and the Improvement Service, and your necessary actions to tackle lengthy delays in the conclusion of legal agreements. We look forward to following your progress in these areas.
- We are interested in the proactive involvement of board members in LDP public consultation and the developers forum, and also the convener's personal role in a fact finding mission with other authorities in relation to process, procedures and practice. We are keen to see elected members of local authorities become more involved in early engagement with stakeholders where appropriate, and perhaps there is some good practice that you can share from your experiences.
- We welcome the availability of learning opportunities for officers and elected members to continue their development of relevant skills and knowledge, and also your wide involvement of officers in identifying performance issues and solutions.

Service improvements 2012-13: delivery

- You have accepted that there were some areas where you did not make anticipated progress on your committed improvement actions and have rolled some forward into a focused programme of improvements for the following year. Nevertheless, you have made some very good progress on what was a large number of committed actions across the range of behaviours and the culture embedded within the PPF, and on which you and your customers should enjoy benefits.

Service improvement commitments 2013-14

- The actions you have committed for 2013-14 are all well trailed through your performance report as priority areas, particularly for improving efficiency and customer experience in application handling. We look forward to hearing of your progress with this important work.

Conclusion

- Your report provides a good, clear assessment of where the authority has got to in reforming and delivering its planning service, while also identifying a fair amount of work still to be carried out. It includes some very encouraging signs of a culture of continually seeking out ways to improve the service offered to, and expected by, developers, community representatives and other stakeholders.

- We are pleased to see continued progress towards the adoption of your LDP within 4 years from the current local plan.
- While you have made some substantial improvements to application timescales, you are aware of scope to further quicken your processes and have a programme in place to take this forward. Your introduction of processing agreements and your planned improvements to your pre-application involvement and advice should contribute well to this.
- You have taken forward some very positive work through your design awards scheme and case studies to encourage good quality development within the national park.

The feedback in this report is based solely on the information provided to us within your Planning Performance Framework Report covering the period April 2012 to March 2013.

If you need to clarify any aspect of the report please contact us on 0131 244 7148 or email sgplanning@scotland.qsi.gov.uk

We hope that this feedback will be of use to you in the preparation of your next report which covers the period April 2013 to March 2014. Please note that we are in discussions with HOPS and COSLA about the potential benefits of bringing the submission date forward, closer to the end of the reporting period. We will let you know as soon as a decision has been made.

PERFORMANCE MARKERS REPORT 2012-13

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| Name of planning authority: Cairngorms National Park Authority |
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The High Level Group on Performance agreed a set of performance markers. We have assessed your report against those markers to give an indication of priority areas for improvement action. The high level group will monitor and evaluate how the key markers have been reported and the value which they have added.

The Red, Amber, Green ratings are based on the evidence provided within the PPF reports. Where no information or insufficient evidence has been provided, a 'red' marking has been allocated.

| No. | Performance Marker | RAG rating | Comments |
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| 1 | Decision-making: continuous reduction of average timescales for all development categories [Q1 - Q4] | Amber | Generally good improvement across local developments; scope to take this further though and improvement commitments for 2013-14 are geared towards this. Some confusion about the timescale for the single major application decided during 2012-13. |
| 2 | Processing agreements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> offer to all prospective applicants for major development planning applications; and availability publicised on website | Red | Authority has been making preparations for introducing processing agreements, but not started in 2012-13. |
| 3 | Early collaboration with applicants and consultees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> availability and promotion of pre-application discussions for all prospective applications; and clear and proportionate requests for supporting information | Amber | At 43%, a normally decent statistic for pre-application advice, but this is greatly reduced from the previous year's figure of 69% - and given CNPA's particular role only in certain applications its regular involvement in likely call-in cases is desirable. This is encouraged on the authority's website. Information needed on how early engagement is used to ensure proportionality in information requests. |
| 4 | Legal agreements: conclude (or reconsider) applications after resolving to grant permission <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reducing number of live | Red | Authority accepts this has taken too long previously; a view supported by statistics. Improvement actions intended to address this in 2013-14, including a proposed procedure to prompt committee reconsideration of |

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| | applications more than 6 months after resolution to grant (from last reporting period) | | applications. |
| 5 | Enforcement charter updated / re-published within last 2 years | Green | Charter reviewed since last annual report; and reviewed annually. |
| 6 | Continuous improvement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • progress/improvement in relation to PPF National Headline Indicators; and • progress ambitious and relevant service improvement commitments identified through PPF report | Amber | <p>Some decent progress made with NHIs, including movement on the LDP and quickening of local application handling (but with some work still to do in this area). Further efforts on processing agreements and pre-application advice being taken forward in 2013-14.</p> <p>Progress fairly well made with what was a substantial body of improvement actions committed previously; some key actions rolled forward into 2013-14.</p> |
| 7 | Local development plan less than 5 years since adoption | Green | Local plan 2 years since adoption. |
| 8 | Development plan scheme – next LDP: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on course for adoption within 5 years of current plan(s) adoption; and • project planned and expected to be delivered to planned timescale | Green | On track to deliver LDP within 4 years. |
| 9 | Elected members engaged early (pre-MIR) in development plan preparation – <i>if plan has been at pre-MIR stage during reporting year</i> | N/A | LDP was not at pre-MIR stage during 2012-13; however good examples of a proactive, leading role of board members in public consultations. |
| 10 | Cross sector stakeholders* engaged early (pre-MIR) in development plan preparation – <i>if plan has been at pre-MIR stage during reporting year</i> <i>*including industry, agencies and Scottish Government</i> | N/A | |
| 11 | Regular and proportionate policy advice produced on: | Amber | Report notes actions taken to improve information and survey requests for EPS and designated sites, and has committed to build |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> information required to support applications; and expected developer contributions | | <p>on this in the coming year to support efficient validation and decision-making.</p> <p>SPG published guiding developer contributions; more information needed about ensuring proportionality.</p> |
| 12 | <p>Corporate working across services to improve outputs and services for customer benefit (for example: protocols; joined-up services; single contact arrangements; joint pre-application advice)</p> | Green | <p>Protocol in place with partner planning authorities – important to have clear and agreed responsibilities give the particular role of CNPA in planning applications in its area.</p> |
| 13 | <p>Sharing good practice, skills and knowledge between authorities</p> | Green | <p>Worked with the Improvement Service and partner planning authorities during the year, to examine successes and areas for improvement. Also links with the other NPA and SNH to ensure consistency of practices in the national parks.</p> |
| 14 | <p>Stalled sites / legacy cases: conclusion or withdrawal of old planning applications and reducing number of live applications more than one year old</p> | Red | <p>No specific mention of the number or age of any legacy cases; although reference give to the need to progress legal agreements, with a case example provided.</p> |
| 15 | <p>Developer contributions: clear and proportionate expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> set out in development plan (and/or emerging plan); and in pre-application discussions | Red | <p>SPG published guiding developer contributions; more information needed about ensuring proportionality through policy and engagement.</p> |