

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DISCUSSION

Title: Planning Committee Site Visits 28 April 2011

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Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to summarise feedback from Members following the site visits on 28 April and to provide an opportunity to share reflections on the developments visited and how this can benefit future decision making. These visits were the first event in what is to be a structured programme of development activity for Members and this report also provides an opportunity for Members to discuss the content of future events.

Background

1. Although Members have previously visited specific sites in relation to individual applications there had never been a comprehensive tour of developments on the ground. Now that several decisions have translated into reality it was considered opportune to do so.
2. Instead of the scheduled Planning Committee on 28 April, Members spent the day visiting various sites in Badenoch and Strathspey to look at developments that had been the subject of decisions by CNPA and, in some instances by Highland Council. One of the strands of feedback from the Planning Service Workshops held in March was the Members should become more familiar with the Park and visit more of the sites that they are taking decisions on.
3. The majority of Members were able to attend and the extensive itinerary is attached for information (**Appendix 1**). The visit included large housing developments, individual houses, steading conversions, business and infrastructure developments and “one offs” like the Old Logging Way between Aviemore and Glenmore and RSPB Insh Marshes Hide. At the end of the day it was agreed to put an item on the agenda for this meeting to allow for reflection and to share experience with those Members who were unable to attend.

Member Feedback

4. Members also gave some subsequent feedback by e mail and the following are some of the points made:
 - Importance of the pre-application stage as it secures better outcomes and more satisfied applicants
 - Need to improve Aviemore to make it more coherent, give it a sense of place within the Cairngorms, raise the game in terms of quality design and need for Masterplan/Design Statement approach with green space strategy
 - Cumulative impact of so much small-scale development
 - Positive experience and encouraged by many of the good quality developments (Brewery, Insh House, Ardgeal, Inchdryne) and ability to take risks (Uvie)
 - Robertsons' development in Aviemore sympathetic to and in tune with local amenity
 - Queries on reasoning/need for some of affordable housing and excessive size/style – need to take into account for future LDP decisions
 - Impressed by Cairngorms Brewery and would like to see how we can help and encourage such thoughtful and well-founded businesses
 - Impressed by use of Rothiemurchus larch at brewery
 - Knock cottage very impressive
 - Impressed that low cost housing at Ardgeal didn't look like the norm
 - Positive comments about our willingness to permit people to think and act out of the box (Uvie)
 - Need for some sort of scale symbol to accompany plans and elevations presented to us at Committee so that we can address issues of scale of the buildings e.g. a human body image of average height
 - Innovative design and vision needs to be carried through to standard of finish
 - The effect that finishes and paintwork have on overall development
 - Good to see how mixed developments do/do not work
 - How do we get beyond personal opinion of good/bad design?
 - Good to discuss with other Members their reactions to developments in an informal setting
 - Appreciation of situations where our enforcement officer can become involved and what leeway there is for negotiation
 - Welcome future discussion on grouping development together to share services, transport, infrastructure as opposed to dispersed development expecting same quality of provision
 - Be good to explore the strategic processes of Planning, Developing, Implementing, Sustaining, Evolving with regard to Park communities.

5. The following comments about the field visit in general were also provided:
 - Helpful to become more familiar with this part of the Park
 - Would like to hear more about pros and cons of choosing particular options to help inform any influence we can bring in future
 - Be good to have visited more croft/rural based buildings and/or industries to see what scope we have to influence best practise
 - Like to have seen and heard a little more of 'lessons we have learned from' – there must be some we do not wish to repeat

- Next time, if possible, break into smaller groups to enable greater discussion at each site
 - Useful to see the sheer variety and scope sites/projects with which we become involved and have to take decisions
 - Useful to relate drawings to what you actually get on the ground
 - Next time can we look at cases where Committee went against recommendation, also some bridges?
6. It is clear that all who attended enjoyed the day and learnt a lot from it and it will be interesting to hear what comes out in discussion. Everyone agrees that no matter how good the presentation material available at a Committee meeting when a decision is taken on an application, there is nothing to equal seeing a development on the ground in situ. This is obviously not normally possible. We can, however, look at how to improve the quality and range of what is presented when decisions are taken and also take stock more frequently on what has and has not been successful on the ground in terms of building form, siting, materials, landscaping and particular aspects of detail.

Next Steps

7. The Service Improvement Plan for 2010 - 2011 contains an action for a structured programme of development activity for the Planning Committee involving site visits and sessions on particular topics. The site visits on 28 April were a start on delivering that action, but we now need to build up a structured programme for the coming year and beyond which will fit within scheduled business in the Board and Committee meeting calendar. We will include further site visits in the programme, probably on Deeside.
8. In addition to site visits, a number of topics are suggested for these sessions, some of which have already been raised by Members, and in proposed order of priority could cover:
- Windfarms
 - Architecture/Building Design
 - Section 75/Planning Obligations
 - Planning Gain/Developer Contributions
 - Sustainable Design
 - Enforcement
 - Landscape
 - Biodiversity

9. Members are asked to consider this list and remove or add topics so that a full programme can be prepared and dates allocated. The range of potential dates will be available at the meeting. For some topics such as architecture/building design and planning gain/developer contributions we would arrange delivery by external specialists.

Implications

Financial Implications

10. These are accommodated within the existing budget.

Presentational Implications

11. A programme of development activity will have positive presentational implications as it responds to some of the comment from the Planning Service Workshops and will enhance the knowledge level of the Planning Committee when carrying out its business.

Implications for Stakeholders

12. No direct implications although the site visits of 28 April and structured programme of development activity will enhance the Planning Committee's understanding of aspects of stakeholder interest.

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