

PLANNING PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK: 2011-12
FEEDBACK REPORT: Cairngorms National Park Authority



Date performance report due: 30 September 2012
Date of receipt of report: 28 September 2012

Your report includes an introduction which explains the role of the park authority and the unique arrangements for your statutory planning function. We are aware of, and understand, this context and have borne it in mind when producing this feedback.

National Headline Indicators

- Very pleased that the local plan adopted relatively recently, and also that the new Local Development Plan (LDP) is making progress with the draft plan coming forward during this year. This is essential in giving a clear lead and certainty for future investment in development. We understand the point about the Perth and Kinross element and look forward to that area being brought into the park's LDP as soon as possible.
- Information on housing and employment land supply noted. Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS) are currently producing workable definitions for recording 'employment land' and 'commercial floorspace' for second round of reports.
- Good to see your involvement in pre-application advice for a high proportion of applications subsequently called in, particularly recognising the park authority's role at pre-application stage when your future involvement is uncertain. You mention that people can find the pre-application process between yourselves and the six planning authorities confusing; you could explain what steps you have taken to address this.
- While none of the 6 major developments decided in the year had been subject to processing agreements, it is good to see your commitment to use them in future – particularly in light of timescales which averaged well over 2 years. You will be aware that the Scottish Government has recently published a processing agreement template, which we hope will act as a good starting point. Hopefully the level of certainty this brings will encourage developers to work with the authority in project planning their applications in this way, embedding it as normal practice.
- The approval rate for applications called in by the park authority, at 80%, is well below the Scottish average of around 94%.
- While we do fully appreciate the park authority's circumstances, there have been some decision-making timescales that have been substantially longer than we would like there to have been; which can be damaging to the

reputation of the planning system. We note that the timescales for legal agreements have been a major contributor to delay and that you are working with the Developers Forum to address this, and that the legal challenge to the local plan had also had an influence. You need to do all you can to reduce unnecessary delay. Have pre-2009 (pre-planning reform and pre-economic downturn) applications had an influence on the figures, and has the relatively recent adoption of the local plan helped to get some 'legacy' cases off the books?

- Good balance and results in enforcement activity, including annual reviews of your enforcement charter.

Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

- The format of reporting in this section is very well structured, focusing evidence of a range of behaviours under each of the 8 categories. It does though lend itself to reporting only the positive evidence of performance and service quality. Perhaps there is scope to include some short general points under those categories which help to draw links to commitments being made to service improvement later in the report.
- Good evidence of engagement with business and displaying welcoming behaviours, with a view to facilitating development, that can support a reputation of being open for business. It would be useful to back that up with an example of how that approach has helped to deliver a positive experience during the reporting year, perhaps with feedback from a developer. Also good to see your proposals for a Planning Concordat with CBP, that can help to cement positive working relations.
- Recognise the importance of maintaining close relationships with the 5 local authorities over shared interests; particularly important when providing a joint pre-application service. Would be interested to see in future reports how those relationships can or are being used to bring a proportionate approach to information requests, which can help to save time and costs for all.
- Quality of design and place is clearly an essential element of the authority's role, and we are pleased to see the introduction of design awards and a design review panel to support policy and delivery.
- Your programme of committee visits to development on the ground is interesting. It is important to review how the physical environment has changed and understand how planning may have added value to development, to learn for future planning involvement. Good evidence of the benefits of an up-to-date local plan and shared understanding between officers and committee, and the confidence in reliability of advice that can bring to developers.
- Very strong evidence of open engagement, localised with the community, through a range of forums, networks and surveys; all of which can provide invaluable feedback. Future reports could include some findings and outputs, such as customer satisfaction ratings, along with an indication of any follow-up actions.
- We note your proposals for a communications plan and website improvements during the current year; it would be useful if future reports could provide some information about quality and clarity in communications.

- Pleased to see range of steps taken to improve processes and structures across the authority to support more efficient and coordinated service delivery.
- Encouraged by the focus on learning from feedback and on skills development across your service (officers and members).

Service Improvement Commitments 2012-13

- We are very pleased to see the authority committing to a wide range of improvement activities, very clearly linked to the service culture and behaviours embedded through the Planning Performance Framework (PPF).
- We would generally expect the improvement commitments for the coming year to reflect some particular needs or opportunities identified under the first 2 sections of the PPF report template, and it was not entirely clear from the report what possible weaknesses had been identified that the numerous improvements were intended to address. This could be addressed by being more self-critical, as suggested above or through analysis of customer feedback.

Service Improvements 2011-12: Delivery

- Again, a large number of improvement commitments had been made in your previous Service Improvement Plan (SIP). While not all had been fully completed, very good progress had been made, supporting a planning reform and customer service culture.

Conclusion

- Overall, a well structured report describing a customer-focused culture and a move towards the behaviours central to planning reform.
- The report contains a lot of positive evidence, while not much that is self-critical to point to the future improvement needs.
- The report would benefit from some specific examples of actions taken and outcomes/feedback which demonstrate how you have displayed the culture and behaviours envisaged through the PPF.
- A particular priority going forward ought to be on working with stakeholders to bring down decision-making timescales, particularly for major developments.

The feedback in this report is based solely on the information provided to us within your Planning Performance Framework Report covering the period April 2011 to March 2012.

If you need to clarify any aspect of the report please contact us on 0131 244 7076 or email andy.kinnaird@scotland.gsi.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 2012 to March 2013. Please note that the next reports are due to be submitted to us at sqplanning@scotland.gsi.gov.uk **before 30 September 2013.***

The Scottish Government, Planning and Architecture Division
June 2013