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# CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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## FOR DECISION

**Title: Cairngorms National Park Design Awards**

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### **Purpose**

1. This paper seeks the Planning Committee's agreement to proposals for the first Cairngorms National Park Design Awards, which will be launched in March 2012.
2. It also provides a brief update on progress on a range of other design related work set out in the Service Improvement Plan for 2011/12.

### **Recommendation**

3. That the Planning Committee;
  - a. Agree the proposals for the Cairngorms National Park Design Awards to be launched in March 2012,
  - b. Note progress on the Aviemore Design Framework and future programme of work involving the Task and Finish Group
  - c. Note links between the new Developers forum and the work set out in the current Planning Service Improvement Plan on engagement with the development sector on design issues
  - d. Note progress on the development of an energy savings initiative as identified in the Planning Service Improvement Plan.

### **Executive Summary**

4. The importance of the quality of design of development in the Park has been at the forefront of members' minds for some time now, and this paper marks the culmination of some work to progress this area of work.
5. Members are also aware that the current Planning Service Improvement Plan includes a range of actions centred on the quality of design in the National Park.
6. This paper provides a brief update on some of these actions, and also presents proposals for the first Design Awards for the Park.

## Cairngorms National Park Design Awards

7. The development and launch of Design Awards for the Cairngorms National Park has been a long standing aspiration of the members and staff of CNPA, and the development of such awards is an action point in the current Planning Service Improvement Plan.
8. As set out in the paper on design discussed at Planning Committee in June 2011, much thought has been given to the need for design awards, the benefits they can bring to the area and the opportunities they bring to celebrate great design within the Park.
9. Following on from that discussion, and with further internal debate about how the awards would best work, the following is a summary of the proposed format of the awards, and a timetable for their delivery in 2012.
10. Many suggestions have been made by members about the design awards, but Peter Argyle has been of particular help in terms of sharing his experiences of Aberdeenshire Council's design awards, and inputting into the development of the proposals and this committee paper.

### Reason for awards

11. Design Awards will help to promote the importance of good design throughout the Cairngorms National Park as a key element in creating and celebrating 'sense of place'. They will also help to promote and celebrate good design and construction skills that are being delivered by the local development industry – through architects, designers, craftspeople and developers.

### Guiding principles, eligibility and nomination

12. Projects must be of a high standard to be considered for a design award in the Park, and they must show exceptional merit and be of a quality that justifies at least local attention.
13. All entries must be located in the Cairngorms National Park and should have been completed since 2003 when the National Park was formed.
14. Anyone can propose a development for an award. It is entirely appropriate in the case of awards for developers and architects to nominate their own projects. Nominations are also sought from individuals, Community Councils and other community groups.
15. The process of nominating a development for an award will be simple and straightforward in order to encourage applications. It will be important that information about the awards is spread as widely as possible, and that information about the awards continues to be promoted in order to help meet the aims of the awards – encouraging and celebrating good design in the Park.

16. Ongoing discussions with the Communications and Engagement group, and other staff, are helping to come up with a range of means of getting the message out there.

Award categories

17. It is proposed to start with a relatively small number of categories, with the opportunity to build on this in future years. 4 categories are suggested, all of which are particularly appropriate to the type of development that takes place in the National Park.
18. There are many other design awards run by a range of organisations, from local authorities, to Royal Institute of British Architects and the Saltire Society, and which have a much wider range of categories, but these categories have been carefully chosen to reflect what is important here in the Park.
19. The categories are;
- Best new building in the National Park – it can be a new build or the conversion of an existing building to a new use. It can be for residential or business use
  - Best extension or alteration to an existing building – good design isn't always about big projects – small extensions or alterations to existing buildings deserve celebrating too
  - Best example of design for nature – this award is for the best integration of development with the landscape and habitats / species. This award will focus more on the external works around the building, rather than on the building itself
  - Best example of design for other development – good design is not just about buildings, and well designed developments such as bridges and paths also deserve recognition.
20. Awards will not necessarily be made in each category each time the awards are held – this will depend of the quality of entries. It is proposed that there is a winner in each category, but that there is also the option to award other proposals a commendation.

Judging criteria

21. The Cairngorms Design Awards are a mechanism to encourage the very best in sustainable design, stimulating and developing a deeper and broader interest in our traditional and more recent architectural surroundings. The design awards are not only intended to look back to earlier architectural styles and influences. Modern design, contemporary ideas and innovative solutions to the challenges faced by communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should also form an integral part of the ethos of the design awards. The approach for any given development will depend on the relationship with the local built and natural environment.

22. For each category, the schemes will be assessed against the following criteria;
- Use of local materials
  - Use of local trades
  - Environmental credentials
  - Contribution to sense of place and the special qualities in the Cairngorms National Park
  - Relationship with surrounding development / existing structure if an extension or alteration
  - Making the best use of what is on the site already, maintaining what is important and what can be retained, and reusing other resources
  - Creativity / innovation
  - The form of the development, including scale, massing, siting, design, detailing and materials
  - Affordability

Judging panel and process

23. It is essential that the judging panel is able to inspire confidence and be recognised for the expertise, breadth of knowledge and impartiality it can bring. In addition, specialists in relevant fields may be invited to advise the panel on specific areas if required. However, all decision making will remain with the judging panel alone.
24. All nominations will be considered by a panel of judges. The panel will be made up of:
- Convenor CNPA planning committee
  - Deputy convenor CNPA planning committee
  - Representative of local building industry
  - 2 Architects / designers who have a national reputation and a link to the National Park
  - Representative of Architecture and Design Scotland
  - Representative of National conservation interests
  - Representative of local community
25. Clearly, conflicts of interest would need to be avoided in the choice of judges, and as such, the exact make up of the panel may vary from year to year.
26. All applications will be considered against the criteria listed based on a brief application form and photos. A shortlist will be drawn up and all of these entries will be visited by the judges. The judging panel will remain consistent throughout the two rounds. The Judging panel will make the final decisions on awards to be made in each category.

### Timetable

27. It is intended to launch the Design Awards in March, but advance publicity will take place before this, in order to start to spread the work and build up interest in the awards. The deadline for applications will be May 2012, with judging taking place between June and August. It is intended to announce the awards and celebrate the winning designs in September.

### **Aviemore Design Framework (ADF)**

28. As members will remember, a task and finish group to focus on the ADF was set up following discussions at planning committee in June 2011. The group have met a number of times to go back to basics and agree what was required for Aviemore. The group is made up of Board members and a representative of the Aviemore and Vicinity Community Council. The group have had many interesting discussions and have made, and continue to make, an excellent contribution to the work on the framework.
29. The Task and Finish Group will meet in January 2012 to consider a draft of the final document, and this will then be brought back to the next planning committee for final agreement.
30. Details of how the framework will be delivered are also part of the ongoing discussions, and proposals for this will be included in the paper to committee on this.

### **Engagement with the Local Development Sector**

31. The formation of the new Developers Forum (details presented to planning committee in December 2011 by Don McKee) provides a great opportunity for ongoing engagement with the development sector. Design will be an important issue for this forum to consider and as such will form part of the ongoing work and debate at these forums in the future. Action 2c in the Planning service improvement plan identifies the need to scope out how best to engage with the development sector and share good practice on design matters. Discussions at forthcoming forum meetings will address this, and further activity will flow from this in the coming year.

### **Development of an energy savings information initiative**

32. The Planning Service Improvement plan also set out an action relating to energy savings information for planning applicants. On looking into this action in more detail, it became clear that rather than developing a separate initiative, it made more sense, and a better use of resources, to make better use of information that already existed.

33. The Energy Savings Trust have developed guidance specifically aimed at planners and this is a good resource we can make better use of.
34. Further meetings on a range of issues are also planned with the Energy Savings Trust in 2012, and additional opportunities for promoting energy efficiency advice to planning applicants will remain on the agenda.

### **Conclusions**

35. The launch of the first Design awards for a National Park in Scotland will be an important step forward in taking forward our collective aspirations for improving the quality of design in the Park and also celebrating the excellent work that is already being carried out in the area.

**Alison Lax**  
16 December 2011