
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DISCUSSION

Title: Review of Planning Call-In Arrangements

Prepared by: Don McKee
Head Planner

Purpose:

To report back on the operation of the current planning call-in arrangements in line with the resolution of the Planning Committee on 1 April 2011.

Recommendation

That Members of the Planning Committee discuss and note the contents of the report.

Background

1. The Planning Committee on 1 April 2011 resolved to ending of the trial and move to online “call-in” on a permanent basis subject to:
 - Reporting back on its operation every 6 months;
 - Continuing to improve the effectiveness of the system.
2. The detail of the current arrangements is as follows:
 - Local Authorities notify CNPA of planning applications on an ongoing basis with CNPA deciding every 2 weeks whether to “call-in” or comment on applications.
 - Call-In List closes at noon every second Friday and is sent out to Members and posted on our website.
 - Planning staff research the applications on the list and prepare a presentation that will be available on the CNPA website for Members and the public from noon on the following Wednesday.
 - This presentation with maps, plans, photos and text combines the information previously given at Committee in powerpoint and verbal reports.
 - Members have until noon on Friday (or 0900 if a Planning Committee day) to look at the presentation and respond;
 - Members have to respond to planning@cairngorms.co.uk confirming they have looked at the presentation, state if they agree with the recommendations, and provide any comments they wish to make where there is no “call-in”. Members also have to state if they have a direct or indirect interest in any application on the list.

- Where 2 or more Members do not agree with a recommendation it is then referred to the Convener and Vice-Convener of the Planning Committee to decide and they have until 1500 on the Friday to do this. If they are not going to be available they will name substitutes.
- After 1500 on Friday the Local Authorities are notified of the decision and any comments on applications not called in. The previous arrangements for comments continue with it being left to planning staff to determine if and how to pass them on.
- The note of the outcome of the process is available on the CNPA website the following Monday and is reported to the next Planning Committee.

Operation of “Call-In”

3. Since 1 April 2011 we have been running this system on a permanent basis in line with the arrangements in paragraph 2.
4. There have been a number of improvements and refinements as a result of operation of the process by staff and feedback from Members:
 - A template has been developed to ensure consistency in the online presentation.
 - The number of slides in the presentation has been streamlined to make it easier to access and navigate.
 - The use and choice of photographs is carefully considered to ensure the presentation is a manageable size to access.
 - We have worked closely with the contractor responsible for maintaining the CNPA website to ensure that the process is as streamlined as possible and the presentation is of an accessible size.
 - Links to Council websites have been added so Members can view more information on applications.
 - The applicant’s name has been inserted on each slide so Members can determine if they have an interest.
5. There are additional measures that can further improve the effectiveness of the process:
 - We are waiting for PDF converters that will allow images to be converted to a format with a reduced size.
 - Additional software will allow us to put material directly onto the website without the contractor.
 - Members give many useful comments in their responses, but it helps staff manage the process if we receive comments that are framed in a definite way without any scope for ambiguity.
 - If Members consider an application should be “called-in”, it helps staff and the Convener and Vice-Convener if the issue of significance for the aims of the Park is clearly stated.

6. There are a number of statistics that will be of interest to Members:
- From January – end September 2011 the average response rate from Members was 79.12% with the lowest at 63.15% and highest 94.7%. Given occasional holiday and other commitments this demonstrates a consistently high level of participation and we are aware of Members taking part from far flung locations.
 - For the same period an average of 20.79% of Members requested comments on applications and 96.43% agreed with the officer recommendations in the “call-in” report.
 - Over this period we were notified of 322 applications – Aberdeenshire 87, Angus 4, Highland 192, Moray 24, Perth & Kinross 15.
 - Of these we have called in 35 (10.87%) – Aberdeenshire 5, Highland 28, Moray 2.
 - We have commented on 94 (29.2%) – Aberdeenshire 24, Angus 1, Highland 59, Moray 9, Perth & Kinross 1.

Conclusion

7. In summary, it is considered that the process is operating smoothly and is now established as the most effective means of dealing with a function that is unique to CNPA. All involved are now used to it with a clear understanding of what is required to participate. We will continue to make improvements where we can and suggestions from Members and others are always welcome.

Recommendation

That Members of the Planning Committee discuss and note the contents of the report.

Don McKee
planning@cairngorms.co.uk
05 October 2011