

REPORT TO NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY – 30 APRIL 2012

13.0 Excellent Planning Service

Chris Morgan

Report to:	National Park Authority 30 th April 2012
Report Title:	Towards defining and monitoring an “excellent” development management planning service for the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority
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Purpose of Report:	To reach agreement as to how best to measure “performance” in the Development Management part of the Planning Directorate – to move away from just using simple measures such as “speed of determination” to more sophisticated measures around such notions as added value, outputs and quality of life for residents
Enclosures	None
Background Papers	None
Public Interest Test	Not Applicable
Recommendation	To agree the set of eight quantitative and qualitative measures that the Authority should use to indicate whether it is delivering an “excellent” development management planning service

13.1 Introduction

The National Park Authority has identified three Planning related Improvement Objectives for this year. The first two relate to the Building Conservation and Enforcement functions, whilst the third is to strive towards an “excellent” planning service, and in doing so, to provide a realistic and measureable set of standards that

the National Park Authority (NPA) has determined provide a reasonable basis for indicating progress towards that goal. In reality this objective relates to the development management function, with the Local Development Plan part of the Directorate covered under the Corporate Objectives for 2012-2013.

Set out below are a range of quantitative and qualitative notions that help define “excellence” together with suggested associated measurements. Implicit in the narrative is the view of the Director of Planning that the eight being recommended for approval represent an acceptable selection to represent “excellence” and to measure progress against.

1) Achieving the Welsh Government’s (WG) “target” for determining planning applications within 8 weeks

Timely decisions are key for economic development and to inspire general confidence in the planning process. There is always a public expectation that some measure of speed of determination is essential and, an excellent planning service will be able to deliver decisions on time generally speaking. Currently the WG target is 65% and the NPA has achieved that target in 2011-2012. To strive to be better, it is suggested that the internalised target for the Brecon Beacons NPA in 2012-2013 be set at 70%.

2) Providing timely and professional pre-application advice and validation guidance

This is a quality measure that is likely to improve subsequent applications made and, as a corollary, the likelihood of approval. It is suggested that the service counts the number of applications subject to pre-application discussions and then measures the percentage that have subsequently been approved where the initial advice has been followed.

3) Conceptualising and Visualising “Value Added” through the pre-application and submission of application process

“Measuring” Value added is the difficult one, but is essential to understand the level of service provided as an “output” of the process. It is suggested that a change be made to the validation scheme to ensure that, where pre-application discussions have taken place on schemes of, say, three dwellings or more, mixed-use developments and economic schemes, the Design and Access Statement that must accompany the application clearly

shows, conceptually and visually, using three dimensional models, how the scheme has evolved from initial inception through to application. This will provide a subjective measurement of the “value added” in terms of visual impact/amelioration as appropriate. The Design and Access Statements would be held electronically and provided as qualitative evidence of what an excellent planning service can provide.

4) Additional “Added Value” Notions

Recognising that there are other ways of looking at additions that the provision of an excellent planning service can provide in terms of “outputs”, it is suggested that the Authority records the number of planning obligations secured through S106 Agreements in both categories One and Two, providing both a qualitative and quantitative measure of benefits accruing to communities, the landscape and biodiversity. This information should be accompanied by a commentary setting out progress, or otherwise, during any one financial year – this “measure” recognizing that the outcomes are dependent on types and numbers of applications received.

5) Appeals

To be an excellent provider of the service , the Authority should be taking consistent, robust decisions in line with development plan policies and other material considerations. These should be upheld at appeal. Whilst it is not realistic to expect to win all appeals since by their very nature they allow an independent inspector to examine the evidence afresh, a confident planning authority will expect to have most dismissed. Notwithstanding the target of 100% in the Business Improvement Plan, it is suggested that for the purposes of this of this exercise, the Authority sets an internal target for winning appeals of 80% for 2012-2013.

6) Monitoring of Customer Contact and Satisfaction

The administrative team provides a “front-line” face to users of the service. There is, in place, a detailed “Customer Care Charter for Development Control”. It is suggested that the Supervisor records levels of contact with users and turnaround time for issuing Decision Notices to provide a benchmark for future monitoring, and assesses the level of service provided overall by continuing to carry out and analyse quarterly customer satisfaction surveys. It is also suggested that the level of complaints about the service is regularly monitored as a guide to satisfaction or otherwise.

7) Community Engagement

Vital in the development management process if communities and their council representatives are to feel fully engaged in the process. The Authority routinely consults neighbours and community councils as well as relevant statutory consultees, but feedback from the former two groups suggest they generally desire a much better understanding to engage more constructively. It is suggested that the service provides “training sessions” across the Park to serve this end, and that feedback from those sessions be analysed, with a subsequent analysis of comments received on a sample of individual planning applications post those sessions.

8) Procedure

The Customer Care Charter for Development Control outlines what any applicant needs to know about submitting a planning application. The easiest way to submit, and one actively encouraged by the Welsh Government, is online via the Planning Portal. An excellent service will ensure that this facility is readily available and understood. It is suggested that the Authority collects monthly data on electronic submissions, both in absolute numbers and percentages, and compares the data with other Authorities in Wales.

Corporate Implications	
a) Financial, Staffing and Improvement	Improvement is implicit. At this juncture it is not anticipated that there will be any financial or staffing implications
b) Equality	Implicit
c) Human Rights	Implicit
d) Sustainability Appraisal	In train
e) Biodiversity Impact	Included in some of the measures
f) Contribution towards mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change	Implicit in many of the processes being measured
g) National Park Management Plan Actions	
h) Background Papers	None
i) Which Corporate Goal(s) does the recommendation support?	1. Taking Care of Planning 2. Taking Care of Business 3. Taking Care of Environment 4. Taking Care of People

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RECOMMENDATION: To agree the set of eight quantitative and qualitative measures that the Authority should use to indicate whether it is delivering an “excellent” development management planning service

EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF NPA – 30 APRIL 2013

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The Director of Planning presented a list of suggested criteria which could be used to define an excellent development management service and which represented a more sophisticated approach than speed of determination.

The Chairman of the Planning, Access and Rights of Way Committee supported this approach and said that engagement with the applicant and with communities, possibly through the cluster meetings, was important. He congratulated officers on these criteria. Members concurred with this and felt that this would encourage a more customer focused approach and improve public perception of the service. A member suggested that the Authority should not miss the opportunity to engage with consultee bodies outside the statutory requirements. It was also felt that given the continuing lack of awareness of the planning system and the improvements in performance there was a need to consider more awareness raising. It was suggested that it might be useful to discuss this with Planning Aid Wales who might have some useful ideas.

In response to a question the officer confirmed that the town and community councils had requested training on planning and that three sessions had been scheduled for July.

The Chairman of the Authority concluded that following a discussion with the Chief Executive they had agreed that a meeting with councillors who held wards in the Park so that this could help raise awareness.

RESOLVED: To agree the set of eight quantitative and qualitative measures that the Authority should use to indicate whether it is delivering an “excellent” development management planning service