Report No. **02/13** Conservation and Planning Review Committee

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF PARK DIRECTION AND PLANNING

SUBJECT: PILOT SURVEY OF USERS OF THE PLANNING SERVICE THROUGH OCT/NOV 2012

Purpose of Report

To provide members with the results of a recently commissioned survey into users' views of the PCNPA planning survey.

Introduction

During October/November 2012, all recipients of planning decision letters were invited to make comments on the service they had received. Of 60 decision letters sent out during this time, 14 responded to the request. (23% response rate).

Background

Previous surveys have been completed, the last similar one undertaken in 2009. Other forms of customer satisfaction have been gauged, for example through the citizen panel which asked planning related questions in September 2009.

Reading the press, and being in receipt of complaints, the perception is that the planning process and service is generally not providing a satisfactory service and that the majority of users are disgruntled with the handling of their planning applications.

It should be noted that the planning applicants are just one sector of users of the planning service. There are also those who are third parties, consultees and also the enforcement and local plan participants.

It should be noted that the survey only focussed on planning applicants as respondents.

<u>Comparisons</u>

We are asked by the Audit Office (and our members on occasions) as a local planning authority to provide information which is comparable with our counterparts – other planning authorities in general and with the 2 other Welsh National Parks in particular.

The survey questions were generated by the Planning Officers Society for Wales initially, as a template for all LPAs to use. Unfortunately many LPAs have tweaked the questions so that there is no direct use for comparison purposes. However, this

questionnaire is exactly as Snowdonia has framed its survey questions and therefore comparisons can be made with the results of the two planning authorities.

Officers decided that a short timeframe for the survey would reveal sufficient information to estimate whether the survey format worked for the participants and if the results were specific enough to inform the future of the PCNPA planning service.

The questionnaire was also an opportunity for officers to test the effectiveness of a software package 'SurveyMonkey' which is relatively easy to use, administer, interrogate and which provides instant basic analysis.

The Results

See appendix one for questionnaire and results. The numbers are very small so no great analysis should be drawn.

But of interest

Applicant Response	Officer comment
Over 75% of respondents were agents	Pleased that agents considered it
	worthwhile giving feedback.
Just over 50% had used pre-app service	Disappointing, but perhaps understandable if applications are put in by professionals who already understand the system, or perhaps our timing on this part of the process was not sufficient speedy to warrant its use. (see comments elsewhere)
Over 80% satisfied or very satisfied with assistance given	This reflects positively on treatment of applicants given by our planning staff.
75% satisfied or very satisfied with the advice received from officers	Again, this high percentage is a clear commendation that our planning staff are fulfilling most applicants' expectations on the quality of advice given. This is also important, as the survey was completed by agents who would be familiar with the system.
Over 80% satisfied or very satisfied with the availability of officers	This was a surprising result, given perception that officers are difficult to get hold of – see all comments elsewhere.
Over 80% satisfied or very satisfied with the time taken to respond to messages and letters?	Again, surprising that this % was so high given that complaints received are often to do with length of delay. It is interesting to note that people's expectations as to the time taken to answer queries has reduced significantly with the advent of email. We aim to deal with all correspondence in whatever format within 10 working days.
Over 80% satisfied or very satisfied with	Again, this result would infer that there is
the information received on progress	adequate dialogue between planning

	staff and planning applicants.
Over 90% satisfied or very satisfied with courtesy and professionalism	This acknowledgement is particular pleasing, as it demonstrates that staff are maintaining a courteous manner – in what could be considered stressful situations where demands are put on their time to work within parameters they are unable to influence.
Over 75% said that following their recent experience they had a better understanding of the PCNPA's planning policies	This is a significant and important issue, as an understanding of policy will potentially influence further applications submitted to PCNPA.
Overall, over 80% were satisfied or very satisfied with the service.	Again, this would be contrary to perception. This still leaves almost one fifth of respondents who were not satisfied and responses are set out below to attempt to address their concerns where possible.
9 respondents chose to illustrate or expand on their answers.	See 'Matters for Action'

Comparison with Snowdonia National Parks planning questionnaire returns

As stated before, the questions as asked have been the same, however, our survey period was considerably shorter and the number of respondents much smaller. This may have had the effect of slightly skewing the results. The results indicate that in general the satisfaction rates for applicants/agents within PCNPA area are similar with those of SNPA customers. See appendix two.

Matters for action

Applicant's comment Officer comment				
Ensure advice between	officers	is	We have been in a stage of transition	
consistent. Conflicting validation requirements mea		on	with national validation requirements coming out recently and with our own local validation requirements also being referred to. The consistency for the validation of planning applications is an issue which is not just a difficulty for PCNPA – hence the national intervention in validation procedures. It will take a while for agents and applicants to familiarise themselves with these requirements and indeed for planners too. This should be less of an issue in the future if all LPA's apply a consistency of approach to the interpretation of the national validation requirements. Fortnightly team meetings take place	

Pre-apps takes too long therefore did not do this on this application. Perhaps an officer site meeting (for contentious applications) is essential	within the Development Management section where issues of consistency, interpretation of policy and the impact of case law are discussed and an agreed approach put forward. Officers do indeed undertake site visits and site meetings if considered necessary on contentious pre- applications. However, it is for the planning authority to react to proposals not to advise applicants of potential uses for a site.
Info on the website could be improved, and include consultee replies and officer reports	Agreed, we are in the process of improving and updating the text on the web. However, we are restricted in the additional information that can be provided due to IT issues. These are likely to be overcome in the next 18 months and there is a budget to improve the website including the provision of a document management system which will be necessary too.
I wish all applications were dealt with as smoothly as this one.	So do we!
Some elements of the process were confusing. Perhaps brief guide with a few worked examples showing what would be required would help.	There are guides out there and useful websites, and we assist potential applicants if they request help. However, working up examples has in the past meant that applicants cut and paste from these and do not provide information specific to their site or their proposals. Updating the website will be a way of providing further information.
I don't understand why all the information is required, but the people clarified what I needed.	Much of the information required is set out in legislation and the national validation requirements – our staff are able to advise of the requirements when asked specific questions.
It would be helpful if agents could meet planning officers to discuss pre-apps prior to submitting pre-apps as this could save time.	Not so. This route has been used in the past and much time is wasted with agents not having worked up proposals with their clients. Meetings after the pre- application has been submitted are available and are promoted and suggested by officers when necessary, especially on complicated or controversial planning proposals. However it is essential that there is written evidence of officers' views on proposals. This is also essential to maintain consistency of advice and also

The Authority should meet fellow professionals and be able to make decisions at such meetings and the authority will adhere to. This should include a time determination.	to ensure that a record of pre- applications is kept to enable effective monitoring of the service. At present this is a free service and officers would wish it to remain so with the aim of encouraging more applicants to use it. We have a scheme of delegation within which planners are able to make certain decisions. Other applications must go to Committee. The reference to time determination is not within the jurisdiction of any LPA but is set down by WG – eg the 8 week period for dealing with planning applications is a target. The speed of decisions is framed with regard to both applicants and third parties and statutory consultees.
Shorten the 8 week process by giving neighbours and others time to response, let's face it neighbours will from their opinions immediately when they open the letter. 2. Telephone calls should be answered the same day the enquiry is made.	With regard to the 8 week period see above. 2. It would be impossible to answer all telephone calls the same day. We deal with them on the same basis of other contacts – but obviously messages left are dealt with as speedily as possible as with any other correspondence. All telephone messages are logged. At the time of writing these were the number of messages outstanding on our metis system for DM staff. Dept.Messages © Dev. Management Service (15) © Brian Canning (1) © Dai Griffiths (8) © Julia Evans (1) © Context Service (15) © This does not give cause for concern that officers are not dealing with telephone messages efficiently.
Newsletter is an excellent idea. An invitation to agents to meet staff and discuss issues or attend a seminar could be helpful. Easier to communicate face to face.	The Newsletter is rather a 'snippets from the Park' an informal round robin email to our local agents who submit planning applications. It is appreciated that they often work as sole practitioners and it is difficult to keep up to date and fully aware of planning issuesthe December 2012 issue is attached at appendix 3. The

idea of a seminar was mooted in the Newsletter. To date there has been no response to this suggestion.

Risk considerations

Equality Issues and the Welsh Language

The survey was provided in both English and Welsh – as separate documents. No results were received in Welsh.

Although available for completion on the web, all submissions were paper copies. In discussion with SNPA it has become evident that there is a far better response rate if a telephone interview is undertaken. This is a way forward, there would be some officer input, but it is considered that it would be appropriate to do a random selection of applicants to inform our planning service too.

Conclusion

The survey was of only a very limited size, but demonstrated that on the whole there is satisfaction in the current planning service, but that there is room for improvement. Additional sampling would also be helpful in coming to informed decisions as to what changes should be made to the planning service.

The survey should be extended throughout the year on the web, with random telephone sampling of applicants to complement this. Other user groups should also be sampled to understand their perspective on using the service.

2013 Actions

Extend questionnaire onto the website Include a telephone sampling of applicants Extend user group surveying of the planning system

Recommendation

That members note the results on the sample survey and also note the operational improvements that officers will put into practice during 2013.

Background Documents

(For further information, please contact Jane Gibson)

Author: Jane Gibson Consultees: Vicki Hirst, Phil Barlow, Alan Hare,



1. Please enter the reference number for your most recent planning application

	Response Count
	14
answered question	14
skipped question	0

2. Was this application on your own behalf or were you acting as an agent for the applicant?

	Response Percent	Response Count
On own behalf	23.1%	3
As an Agent	76.9%	10
	answered question	13
	skipped question	1

3. Did you contact the Planning Service to discuss your proposals before you submitted your planning application?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	53.8%	7
No	46.2%	6
	answered question	13
	skipped question	1

4. How satisfied were you with the assistance given to you?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Satisfied	33.3%	2
Satisfied	50.0%	3
Dissatisfied	16.7%	1
Very Dissatisfied	0.0%	0
	answered question	6
	skipped question	8

5. Was the application form easy or difficult to complete?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Easy	41.7%	5
Easy	50.0%	6
Difficult	8.3%	1
Very Difficult	0.0%	0
	answered question	12
	skipped question	2

6. Was the supporting information easy or difficult to understand?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Easy	25.0%	3
Easy	33.3%	4
Difficult	41.7%	5
Very Difficult	0.0%	0
	answered question	12
	skipped question Pag	ge 22 2

7. How satisfied were you with the advice received from the officers dealing with your application?

	Respo Perce		esponse Count
Very Satisfied	58	.3%	7
Satisfied	16	.7%	2
Dissatisfied	25	.0%	3
Very Dissatisfied	0	.0%	0
	answered quest	tion	12
	skipped quest	tion	2

8. How satisfied were you with the availability of the Planning Officer dealing with your application (either for arranged meetings or on the telephone)?

	Response	Response
	Percent	Count
Very Satisfied	46.2%	6
Satisfied	38.5%	5
Dissatisfied	0.0%	0
Very Dissatisfied	15.4%	2
	answered question	13
	skipped question	1

9. How satisfied were you with the time taken to respond to messages and letters?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Satisfied	46.2%	6
Satisfied	38.5%	5
Dissatisfied	7.7%	1
Very Dissatisfied	7.7%	1
	answered question	13
	skipped question	1

10. How satisfied were you with the information you received on the progress of your application?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Satisfied	61.5%	8
Satisfied	23.1%	3
Dissatisfied	15.4%	2
Very Dissatisfied	0.0%	0
	answered question	13
	skipped question	1

11. How satisfied were you with the general courtesy and professionalism of the officers who dealt with your application?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Satisfied	76.9%	10
Satisfied	15.4%	2
Dissatisfied	7.7%	1
Very Dissatisfied	0.0%	0
	answered question	13
	skipped question	1

12. Following your recent experience with the Planning Service, would you say you now have an improved/better understanding of the Authority's planning policies?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	76.9%	10
No	23.1%	3
	answered question	13
	skipped question	1

13. Overall, how satisfied were you with the service you received from the Planning Department in dealing with your application?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Satisfied	61.5%	8
Satisfied	23.1%	3
Dissatisfied	15.4%	2
Very Dissatisfied	0.0%	0
	answered question	13
	skipped question Pag	1 e 25

14. We are committed to improving the service you receive. Please make any comments or suggestions in the space below	
	Response Count
	10
answered question	10
skipped question	4

Page 1, Q1. Please enter the reference number for your most recent planning application 1 NP/12/0505 Jan 8, 2013 7:58 AM 2 NP/12/0407 Nov 19, 2012 4:20 AM 3 NP/12/0492 Nov 19, 2012 4:17 AM 4 NP/12/0457 Nov 16, 2012 12:57 AM 5 NP/12/0444 Nov 13, 2012 1:43 AM 6 09/310 Nov 6, 2012 2:43 AM 7 NP/12/049 Nov 5, 2012 8:07 AM 8 Oct 23, 2012 7:03 AM NP/12/0282 9 Oct 22, 2012 11:43 PM NP/12/0392 10 NP/12/0428 Oct 22, 2012 7:15 AM 11 11/999 Oct 22, 2012 5:59 AM 12 NP/12/0383 Oct 10, 2012 4:03 AM 13 NP/12/0406 Oct 9, 2012 3:43 AM 14 NP/12/0346 Oct 7, 2012 11:56 PM

	Page 4, Q14. We are committed to improving the service you receive. Please make any comments or suggestions in the space below		
1	Ensure advice between officers is consistent. In our case advice advice changed which meant a delay in achieving correct validation of 3 months + once 'air was cleared' officer was very efficient for which we thank him.	Jan 8, 2013 8:01 AM	
2	A pre-application was not made on this project. Reason: Previous pre- applications have taken longer than notified time. Fore future perhaps suggest that officer site meeting (where contentious application) is essential.	Nov 19, 2012 4:22 AM	
3	The information available on the website in respect of planning applications could be improved by making submitted information, consultee replies and officer reports available to view	Nov 19, 2012 4:19 AM	
4	I wish all applications were dealt with as smoothly as this one.	Nov 16, 2012 12:58 AM	
5	I found some elements of the process confusing having never gone through this process before. Perhaps a brief guide would help, say a few worked examples showing what would be required to achieve an application.	Nov 13, 2012 1:45 AM	
6	I don't think I fully understand why certain information is required by the Planning Application Form but the people I met did clarify what was needed.	Nov 5, 2012 8:09 AM	
7	It would be very helpful if agents could meet planning officers at the national park offices to discuss pre-planning applications prior to submitting pre-apps formally as in some straight forward cases this could save time	Oct 23, 2012 7:05 AM	
8	The Authority should meet fellow professionals and be able to make decisions at such meetings and the authortiy will adhere to. This should include the time determination period (? illegible hand writing).	Oct 22, 2012 11:48 PM	
9	Shorten the 8 weeks validation process by: 1. Giving neighbours and other agencies the time to respond, lets face it, neighbours will form their opinions immediatelywhen they open the PCNPA advisory letter. Most agencies give a standard response. 2. Telephone calls should be answered the same day that an enquiry is made.	Oct 10, 2012 4:06 AM	
10	The newsletter is an excellent ide. An invitation to agents to meet staff anddiscuss issues or attend a seminar could be helpful. Easier to communicate having met face to face.	Oct 9, 2012 3:47 AM	

Comparison of Snowdonia National Park Authority and PCNPA Planning Services Users: Satisfaction Questionnaire Results

Snowdonia:72 questionnaires returned during 2011/12 Pembrokeshire 14 questionnaires returned during 2 month period Oct/Nov 2012

How satisfied were you with the advice you received from the officers dealing with your application?

	PCNPA	SNPA
Very satisfied	58% (7)	46% (33)
Satisfied	17% (2)	39% (28)
Dissatisfied	25% (3)	8% (6)
Very dissatisfied	0% (0)	7% (5)

How satisfied were you with the availability of the Planning Officer dealing with your application (either for arranged meetings or on the telephone)?

	PCNPA	SNPA
Very satisfied	46% (6)	51% (37)
Satisfied	39% (5)	36% (26)
Dissatisfied	0% (0)	7% (5)
Very dissatisfied	15% (2)	6% (4)

How satisfied were you with the time taken to respond to messages and letters?

	PCNPA	SNPA
Very satisfied	46% (6)	48% (35)
Satisfied	39% (5)	35% (25)
Dissatisfied	8% (1)	10% (7)
Very dissatisfied	8% (1)	7% (5)

How satisfied were you with the information you received on the progress of your application?

	PCNPA	SNPA
Very satisfied	62% (8)	43% (31)
Satisfied	23% (3)	38% (27)
Dissatisfied	15% (2)	9.5% (7)
Very dissatisfied	0% (0)	9.5% (7)

How satisfied were you with the general courtesy and professionalism of the officers who dealt with your application?

	PCNPA	SNPA
Very satisfied	77% (10)	53% (38)
Satisfied	15% (2)	30% (21)
Dissatisfied	8% (1)	4% (3)
Very dissatisfied	0% (0)	13% (9)

Overall, how satisfied were you with the service you received from the Planning service in dealing with your application?

	PCNPA	SNPA
Very satisfied	62% (8)	49% (35)
Satisfied	23% (3)	33% (23)
Dissatisfied	15% (2)	8% (5)
Very dissatisfied	0% (0)	10% (7)

Contacts:

SNP: Bethan Hughes PCNPA: Phil Barlow

Caroline Llewellyn

From:Jane GibsonSent:19 December 2012 14:48To:Sue DaviesSubject:Snippets for agents from Pembrokeshire Coast National Park
planners

Festive Greetings

Just thought I'd drop you a line with the latest of what's going on - something perhaps for you to read over the Christmas break!

Snippets from National Park planners

- Our November 2012 figures show that overall 71% of all planning applications were determined in 8 weeks. Even better was the householders category, where 86% were determined with the 8 week target. We registered 34 planning applications in November and determined 35. And despite perceptions - 86% of planning applications were approved.
- 2. We also undertook a short customer satisfaction survey (some of you may have replied, if so, thank you). Again feedback was in the main positive from agents with a note that this Newsletter was useful. Full results will be reported to committee in the New Year.
- Community Council Training We've been out and about offering Community Council's advice as to how to make best use of their opportunity to respond to consultations on planning applications. We've so far been to about 10 community councils, if you know of others who would like to partake please contact Jennifer Nunnery on email: jennifern@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk
- 4. Together with Pembrokeshire County Council and Carmarthenshire County Council we've been putting on free training sessions for planners, all local government officers and RTPI members. So far, the 2 sessions have been Sustainable Drainage systems and a legal update. Biodiversity is the next one planned for 29th January 2013, others will include small scale wind turbines and affordable housing. If you're eligible to attend please do so. We've been lucky to obtain funding from WG, and the RTPI's Director Roisin Wilmott has kindly taken on the task of organising the events. To have training in West Wales and not having to travel further afield is a real luxury make the most of it! Contact: Roisin Willmott at roisin.willmott@rtpi.org.uk
- 5. We will continue to offer a free pre-application service, and have recently publicised this offer. Interestingly we get about the same number of pre-apps as registered applications, but there can be a significant delay between pre-apps being submitted and a planning application coming forward. Only about a third of pre-apps in 2012 led to a full application, but about 75% of applications have had a pre-app associated with that site, but not always for the same thing, or from the same person.
- 6. Validation still appears to be posing a bit of an issue from both sides of the fence! These seem to be some of the issues which arise on a fairly frequent basis:

- Fees make sure they are right check Fees Regs if in doubt. Nb England's are different so make sure it's the Welsh set.
- Red lines make sure it includes access to the highway, and that it is only land necessary for the development. Eg the classic one is trying to increase the size of a garden by having a red line that incorporates agricultural land;
- Arboricultural reports if trees, hedges etc are shown on the drawings, mentioned in the D&A, etc, then the form should reflect this. An application is also invalid if trees are noted but there isn't a corresponding arb report;
- Descriptions make sure that they describe the development accurately no more "Extensions and Alterations" please.
- PCNPA, PCC and Carmarthenshire has recently commissioned Simon White Associates to provide a report on the Cumulative Impact of Wind Turbine Development. Wind Turbines continue to cause much angst, PCNPA has been plotting all windturbine applications throughout Pembrokeshire – this information is available on our website at: <u>http://www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk/default.asp?pid=528&LangID=1</u>

Recent publications which may be of interest:

1. Welsh Governments One Planet Development Guidance at:

http://wales.gov.uk/topics/planning/policy/guidanceandleaflets/?lang=en

(there's more technical detail to go with this guidance including an ecological footprint calculator!)

2. and to go with that PCNPA has just drafted for consultation its own Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on the subject details in:

http://www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk/Files/files/Committee/NPA/12 12 12/57 12%20Draft%20 SPG%20LID.pdf

Watch our website for the formal consultation period which will begin in the New Year.

3. We have recently approved SPG on Recreation which will be uploaded to our website in the New Year.

4. BREEAM update from Welsh Government at:

http://wales.gov.uk/topics/planning/policy/policyclarificationletters/2012/?lang=en

5. Landuse Planning Consultants was commissioned by the Welsh Government to report on Planning in Statutory Designated Landscapes (in other words National Parks and AONBs in Wales. We didn't think we came out of it too badly - read all about it at:

http://wales.gov.uk/topics/planning/planningresearch/publishedresearch/statutorylandscape s/?lang=en

6. The Welsh Government is seeking views on proposals for the introduction of a statutory process for making non-material amendments to existing planning permissions. (do I hear a sigh of relief?). Details at : <u>http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/planning/non-material-amendments/?lang=en_Note consultation end date of 15 March 2013.</u>

7. The New Environmental Body - Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru /Natural Resources Wales

On 25 October, the Environment and Sustainable Development Minister, John Griffiths AM, announced the name of the new body - Natural Resources Wales - Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru in Welsh. The name communicates the remit of the new organisation and the roles of the 3 current bodies, giving continuity from the past into the future. The Minister also announced the 10 Non-Executive Directors of Natural Resources Wales. Read more about the Board here:

http://wales.gov.uk/newsroom/environmentandcountryside/2012/121025bodynamed/?lang= en

8. Further planning related consultation from WG: <u>Proposed Changes to Non-Domestic</u> <u>Permitted Development Rights</u> closing 11 Jan 2013.

Please let us know if these 'round-up newsletters' are useful. There has been a suggestion that a meeting of agents and planners would be useful – perhaps a workshop on validation in the New Year? What do you think?

Seasonal greetings to you all, Kind regards

Jane Gibson

Director of Park Direction and Planning / Cyfarwyddwr Cynllunio a Chyfeiriad y Parc Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority / *Awdurdod Parc Cenedlaethol Arfordir Penfro* Llanion Park / *Parc Llanion* Pembroke Dock / *Doc Penfro* Pembrokeshire / *Sir Benfro* SA72 6DY

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Are you a householder? Interested in what needs planning permission? Check out <u>http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/permission/house</u> Check that you are on the 'Welsh' site – restrictions sometimes apply within National Parks