

# CONSERVATION AND PLANNING REVIEW COMMITTEE

6<sup>th</sup> February, 2013

Present: Mr D Ellis (Chairman)  
Councillor JA Brinsden, Ms C Gwyther, Councillor B Kilmister, Councillor  
Mrs A Lee, Councillor PJ Morgan and Councillor AW Wilcox.

(NPA Offices, Llanion Park, Pembroke Dock: 1.45pm – 2.30pm)

## 1. Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

## 2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2012 were presented for confirmation and signature.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2012 be confirmed and signed.

## 3. Matters arising

### (a) Supplementary Planning Guidance on Traditional Buildings – Minute 5 (Matters arising)

The Chairman reminded Members that, at the last meeting, reservations had been raised on the use of a cut-off date in the Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), and that the term “traditional” be used instead of “pre 1900”. He had discussed the matter with the Authority’s Building Conservation Officer, who believed that a cut-off date of “pre 1939” would be more appropriate and suggested that the draft document be amended accordingly. He then enquired whether the modifications should be reported to the National Park Authority.

The Director of Park Direction and Planning reported that the Head of Park Direction was currently working on a batch of Supplementary Planning Guidance and the SPG on Traditional Buildings would be presented to the National Park Authority once these draft documents had been finalised.

**NOTED.**

## 4. Performance Report for the Period April – December 2012

The report of the Business and Performance Manager presented progress during the quarter for the measures set out in the Corporate Strategy for Outcomes 1, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8 that were relevant to the Committee. The report also listed actions which measured progress in achievement of the outcomes and this was illustrated by their ‘RAG’ status, which was Red, Amber or Green depending on progress made. If an action was marked with “SGL” this was an action from the Strategic Grant Letter.

With regard to Outcome 1e it was reported that the Authority was awaiting guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government which resulted in the red marker.



With regard to Outcome 8a – “*Improve the response times for both pre-application enquiries and planning applications (SGL)*” - this had progressed from red to green whilst Outcome 8j – “*Implement principles outlined in the Strategic Policy Statement for Protected Areas in place by the end of 2012 (SGL)*” had turned to red as the Policy Statement was still awaited from Welsh Government.

Turning to the success measures, the Business and Performance Manager reported that officers continued to work through the backlog of enforcement cases, and the figures had improved significantly from October to December. In addition, 93% of new cases were being closed within 12 weeks.

He then updated Members on planning statistics, stating that 330 planning applications had been registered up to the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013, with 85% of all applications being approved, 65% of which were determined within eight weeks. Of 14 planning appeals submitted during the course of the year, 7 had been dismissed by the Planning Inspectorate.

Members requested details on how many affordable housing units granted permission had been built to date and were informed that this information would be presented to Members at a future meeting in the form of the Annual Monitoring Report on the Local Development Plan. The Authority’s Scrutiny Committee was also involved in looking into the Affordable Housing issue and would be producing its findings shortly.

Finally, the report set out those risks on the Risk Register which were monitored by the Committee. It was noted that the potential risk relating to the possible failure to provide affordable housing opportunities in accord with the targets in the Local Development Plan was highlighted in red, although the Scrutiny Committee was currently considering this topic. Members were of the opinion that the current economic climate would have had an effect on this figure.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be **NOTED**.

## **5. Pilot Survey of Users of the Planning Service through October/November 2012**

The Director of Park Direction and Planning informed Members that 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 14 responded which gave a response rate of 23%.

Members were made aware that the survey only focussed on planning applicants as respondents on this occasion although this was just one sector of users of the planning service.

The survey questions, which were appended to the report before Members that day, had initially been generated by the Planning Officers Society for Wales as a template. Unfortunately many Local Planning Authorities had tweaked the questions so that there was no direct use for comparison purposes however Snowdonia National Park Authority had used the same survey questions



therefore comparisons could be made with that Authority, and these were also appended to the report. A number of suggestions/actions had been highlighted as a result of the survey, and the officers' response to each was detailed in the report.

Officers reported that although the survey was of a very limited size it demonstrated overall satisfaction in the current planning service but indicated that there was also room for improvement. It was felt that additional sampling would be helpful in making informed decisions on what changes should be made.

The survey was to be extended throughout the year on the web, with random telephone sampling of applicants to complement this. It was also felt that other user groups should be sampled to gain their perspective.

Members felt that as the survey was from a small sample of users it would not stand up to scrutiny statistically, and no great conclusions should be drawn. However, overall, they felt that it was a worthwhile and very valid exercise. Officers accepted the comments made, but considered that – now that the process had been established – it would provide useful information for future reference and/or action.

It was **RESOLVED** that the sample survey results and operational improvements that officers would put into practice during 2013, as referred to in the report of the Director of Park Direction and Planning, be **NOTED**.

## 6. Planning – Pre Application Enquiries

At a previous Authority meeting Members had requested some more detailed information on handling pre-application (pre-app) enquiries.

The Business and Performance Manager reported that between January and November 2012 over 560 planning applications had been received with 426 of those being registered. During the same period there had been 428 pre-app enquiries. He went on to say, however, that the pre-app figures did not necessarily correspond with the planning applications received as some pre-apps might have been submitted by different applicants (or for completely different proposals).

Members were also advised that it was possible to have a number of pre-apps for the same site and also pre-apps were not marked as to whether or not they went on to become a full application. There was also the problem that a number of years could elapse between the pre-app and the full application being submitted at which time the application details (or, indeed, planning policy) could be completely different. The Head of Development Management informed Members that they were looking into the possibility of putting a time restriction of six months on pre-app advice.

Members enquired as to the possibility of charging for this service due to the time involved in the processing of pre-apps. Officers felt that there should not be a charge partly because of the current economic climate and also because it



was considered to be a part of the planning service. The Head of Development Management stated that, although there was a time element in processing pre-apps, the resultant planning application could be dealt with more speedily as a lot of the information had already been received. Overall, it was felt that the benefits of putting in the work up front outweighed the time issue involved.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be **NOTED**.

## 7. **Enforcement: update**

The Head of Development Management informed Members that the Planning Enforcement function of the Authority had undergone some changes in recent years. Historically the majority of enforcement matters were brought to the Development Management Committee, but this had been changed in February 2012 when Members had agreed to amend the Scheme of Delegation to allow more enforcement matters to be delegated to senior officers. This amendment, together with changes to the Enforcement team and its processes meant that officers were now able to ensure speedier decisions were taken in line with the advice set out by Welsh Government.

Members were advised that there were now three full time Enforcement Officers working on an area basis who reported directly to the Principal Planning Officer responsible for the management of the team who, in turn, reported directly to the Head of Development Management. The Authority had also adopted a "Planning Enforcement and Compliance Policy" which set out a clear vision regarding the process of investigating complaints and the taking or not of enforcement action. It provided priorities for certain types of alleged breaches of planning control, identified how complaints would be accepted, explained how the decision making process worked and identified the enforcement measures available to the Authority. This Policy had helped both officers and the public to focus on certain breaches and had more transparent and rigorous processes in place.

The Principal Planning Officer had also introduced internal guidelines to Officers on the processing of enforcement cases in line with the adopted Policy. The introduction of a new computer system (APAS) also helped speed up the process.

Prior to implementation of the Enforcement Policy there were over 500 outstanding cases with 430 of those being over 12 weeks old. Since that time there had been a significant improvement with 117 current cases being investigated by Enforcement Officers with only 66 of those being over 12 weeks old.

Members were informed that Officers also monitored conditions attached to planning permissions, however due to priority being given to dealing with complaints received, less priority had historically been given to dealing with this issue. Consideration was being given to introducing a more formal scheme of monitoring.



Members felt that the performance figures spoke for themselves and considered that excellent progress had been made in this area. They thanked the Principal Planning Officer and the Enforcement Team for all their hard work.

It was **RESOLVED** that the improvements made to the enforcement service be **NOTED** and that updates on the work of the service be provided on an annual basis in future.

