

Report to	Planning Committee
Date	14 March 2013
By	Director of Planning
Title of Report	Planning Performance Update – April to December 2012 (Q1, Q2 and Q3)
Purpose of Report	To update the Planning Committee on the performance of the host authorities and the SDNPA development management team on the validation and determination of planning and related applications and other matters.

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to note performance for the period from 1 April to 30 December 2012.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 On 1 April 2012, the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) introduced a single back office system for administering planning and related applications across the whole National Park. The Committee received and noted the last report on performance for the first two quarters of 2012/13 (April to September 2012) at its meeting in December 2012.
- 1.2 This is the third performance report presented to the Committee. The two most recent reports have provided more information than the initial report in August 2012 as the UNiform administration system and the reports that can be obtained from it have been developed. This report only includes limited data on performance before 1 April 2012 as that information is held on the systems of our partner local authorities and has not been collated. However, some limited comparisons are made to help assess trends.
- 1.3 As the amount of information monitored and reported is expanded and improved, it is being collated in the Operations Report which will be presented to the Planning Committee each quarter. This is attached as **Appendix I** and some of the highlights from this are set out below.
- 1.4 Members are reminded that, to date, only the main development management UNiform module is operational and this limits the amount of performance that can be monitored and reported upon. However, it is proposed to introduce further modules in 2013, but only after these have been fully tested internally and with partners. Modules that it is planned to introduce next year include Consultee Access, Appeals and Enforcement, amongst others. Once these are operational, reporting in these areas of the service will also be possible.

2. Validation of planning applications

- 2.1 During the first three quarters of 2012/13, 3,188 applications were received in the National Park. This is very slightly higher than expected, particularly given the overall economic situation. Of these, 44% were submitted electronically through the Planning Portal, slightly higher than the 43% for the first two quarters. Compared to 52% in the first two quarters, a higher proportion of 56% were validated within 5 working days and so there are signs of improvement here. The same proportion as the first two quarters (58%) was made valid at the initial attempt. Similarly, as for the first two quarters, only 3% of applications were returned to applicants because the information requested was not provided.
- 2.2 Within the SDNPA as a whole, 56% of applications were validated within 5 working days.

This was a considerable improvement on the performance achieved in the first quarter and also an improvement on the 52% achieved over the first two quarters. This reflects the significant efforts that have been made to improve the effectiveness of the Idox UNIFORM system. At 31 December 2012, only 41 cases were awaiting validation across the park as a whole.

3. Determination of planning applications

- 3.1 During the first 9 months of the year, a total of 2,190 decisions were made across the Park, of which 55% (1,208) were made within the relevant timescale. This was a significant improvement on the 48% achieved in the first two quarters. Performance between host authorities still appears to vary quite considerably, but some host authorities have shown some real improvements. The performance for the first three quarters for each host authority is shown in the right hand column of Table 7 of **Appendix I**. The comparative figure for each host authority for the first two quarters is shown in brackets. This shows that most host authorities improved their performance and where there was a slight move downward, this was in authorities that are performing very well anyway.
- 3.2 Of the 2,190 applications determined, some 86% were approved or no objection was raised, 9% were refused or objected to and 5% were withdrawn prior to determination. This rate of approval is higher than the national average and the refusal rate appears to be much lower. The performance for the SDNPA and each host authority is set out on Table 9 in **Appendix I**. The preceding Table 8 shows the numbers of major, minor and other applications dealt with by each authority. This shows that only 23 major applications have been determined, a little over 1% of the overall caseload.
- 3.3 Given the general sensitivity of the National Park, it would appear that planning controls are not being applied over-vigorously or that development is being stifled. More detailed analysis of this breakdown will be undertaken at the end of the next quarter to separate out applications approved and refused and decisions on other types of application such as the discharge of conditions and prior notifications.

4. Planning Appeals

- 4.1 At this stage last year, some 50 appeals were submitted across the National Park. So far this year, it appears that numbers are lower as only 25 have been recorded, to date. This potential reduction will continue to be monitored, as not all appeals are yet being recorded on the SDNPA UNIFORM system. Actual numbers may, therefore, be higher and this is consequently also being monitored from other sources. It is also safer to measure these trends over longer periods, if conclusions are to be drawn. Many factors affect the numbers of appeals submitted and these are being kept under review. Once the UNIFORM Appeals module is introduced later in 2013, reporting in this area will improve.
- 4.2 In terms of appeal decisions, 41 decisions have been received from the Planning Inspectorate since 1 April 2012 and Member's attention is also drawn to the fact that 66% of appeals were dismissed. This is still slightly above the national average of around 65%, but it is also lower than the 72% success rate achieved in the first 6 months of the year. It is encouraging that there have been no awards of costs against any decisions made in the National Park in the first 9 months of the year. This suggests that robust and sound decisions are generally being made by the SDNPA and by the host authorities.

5. Planning Fees

- 5.1 The estimate for fee income from planning fees this year is £836,000. In the first 9 months of the year, total fee income received was £614,000 which is reasonably close to the profiled estimate of £627,000 that was planned for at this stage. Some planning fees have to be returned if applications are not validated or if the fee has been overpaid. Equally, sometimes a higher fee is required to make an application valid. The income figure to date should, therefore, only be used as a guide and should be treated with some caution. Final confirmed figures are reported in the final budget at the end of each year

- 5.2 Planning fees were increased by 15% by the Government on 22 November 2012. This welcome increase (the first for over 4 years) should help to ensure that the fee income estimate of £836,000 is achieved this year. It has also been taken into account in preparing estimates of fee income for 2013/14.

6. Section 106 Obligations

- 6.1 During the first 9 months of the year, 14 Section 106 Obligations were completed, although others are understood to be the subject of resolution and are currently under negotiation. The SDNPA is introducing new software to help monitor and manage Section 106 Obligations across the Park and Members will see from Section 5) of **Appendix I** that contributions are being collected for a variety of different purposes. The potential value of such contributions amounts to over £664,000 so far this year. A sum of £50,000 was released for a scheme in Lewes, but this related to and was actually collected by the SDNPA in connection with a scheme that was approved before the SDNPA became the planning authority.
- 6.2 Members are reminded that most contributions will only be forthcoming if the relevant developments actually proceed. These can often be some way off and even then, some contributions are only “triggered” at different stages of development. It can, therefore, sometimes be many years before actual contributions are received.

7. Complaints and Compliments

- 7.1 A total of 26 complaints were received about the Planning Service that is delivered directly by the SDNPA during the first 9 months of the year. Members are reminded that these do not include complaints about the services provided by the 11 host authorities. This is because they each deal with these directly themselves under their own arrangements.
- 7.2 Of the 26 complaints received, almost all (25) have been dealt with satisfactorily and have been closed. Two were escalated to a higher level for resolution, but no complaints have been referred to the Local Government Ombudsman. Given the number of more general issues around the introduction of the new planning administration system during this period (which most complaints have related to, but are now reducing), the numbers are not unexpected. However, it is anticipated that these numbers will reduce as the new system beds down. Members are reminded that complaints are encouraged and received in a positive manner and are used, amongst other factors, to help identify and drive forward improvements to the delivery of the service.
- 7.3 A total of 12 compliments about our service have also been received so far this year. Compliments were made about a number of different areas of the service, including customers giving general thanks for help and assistance provided, the provision of a good planning service, some, positive Idox feedback and some thanks for conducting good presentations.

8. Enforcement and trees

- 8.1 As is explained in paragraph 1.4, during 2013, it is proposed to introduce a number of new modules to the Idox UNiform system, including two that will help manage tree work activity and planning enforcement. Once these go live (enforcement is anticipated in July 2013), future reports will include data on these two important areas of the planning service. Given other priorities, the tree module will be introduced later in the year.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 The improvements to the validation performance are encouraging, as the first two quarters presented some challenges in implementing the new IDOX system. As our partner host authorities become more familiar with the SDNPA processes and the hardware and software problems are resolved (as a result of all the measures that have been put in place), performance should improve still further. There are already some signs of this happening.
- 9.2 The number of applications received in the first nine months of the year is a little above

what was expected and shows a small increase on the total received at this stage last year. Performance in terms of the speed of decision making has improved and that is encouraging.

- 9.3 This report also presents new performance information on other areas of planning such as appeals, fees, complaints and Section 106 Obligations. Reporting will improve still further once additional Idox UNiform modules are introduced in 2013.
- 9.4 Overall, the quality of the service offered appears to be good and improving, with further improvements expected to be achieved during 2013/14 and thereafter. The direction of travel is consequently positive. Service Level Agreements have now been agreed with the 11 host authorities and will be used to measure performance and to help bring service delivery methods and standards closer together from 1 April 2013.
- 9.5 The overall performance and improvements being achieved are of credit to the SDNPA and the host authorities which are helping to deliver the service.

10. Risk management

- 10.1 Monitoring performance on a quarterly basis allows early intervention and reduces the risk of poor outcomes for customers.

11. Human Rights, Equalities, Health and Safety

- 11.1 There are no implications arising from this report.

12. External Consultees

- 12.1 None.

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Appendices Appendix 1 – Planning Operations Report

SDNPA Consultees Director of Strategy and Partnerships, Finance Officer, Monitoring Officer & Legal Services

Background Documents None

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK – OPERATIONS REPORT

April to December 2012 (Q1, Q2 and Q3)

Part A: General Development Management Information

Part B: Host Authority Performance

Part C: Planning Policy Information

PART A –

GENERAL DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

Planning Applications

- (a) Number of planning applications submitted in the National Park since 1 April 2012 – 3,188
(Number submitted at this stage last year – (3,110))
- (b) Number submitted electronically (through the Planning Portal) – 1,401 (44%)
- (c) Number validated within 5 working days – 1,792 (56%)
- (d) Number initially invalid but information requested since 1 April 2012 – 1,253
- (e) Proportion of applications valid at initial attempt since 1 April 2012 – 1,858 (58%)
- (f) Number returned because invalid – 85 (3%)
- (g) Number of cases where it has been confirmed that value has been added since 1 April 2012 – 287 (monitored for all applications only from 1/12/12 onwards when it was implemented fully due to new legislative requirements).
- (h) Numbers of decisions made during period – 2,190
- (i) Number determined within relevant timescale – 1,208 (55%).
- (j) Number and proportion approved* since 1 April 2012 – 1,895 (86%)
- (k) Number and proportion refused since 1 April 2012 – 191 (9%)
- (l) Number and proportion withdrawn prior to determination since 1 April 2012 – 104 (5%)

* Approvals include approved, no objection, conditions discharged and other cases where development is not authorised or agreed.

I) Planning Appeals

- (a) Number of appeals submitted in the National Park since 1 April 2012 – 25
(Number submitted at this stage last year – 50)
- (b) Reason for the appeals
 - Refusal of planning permission – 21 (83%)
 - Appeal against non-determination – 4 (17%)
- (c) Number of appeals decisions since 1 April 2012 - 41
- (d) Number of appeals allowed since 1 April 2012 – 14 (34%)
- (e) Number of appeals dismissed since 1 April 2012 – 27 (66%)

(f) Number of awards of costs since 1 April 2012 - None

2) Planning Fees

Planning application fee income received since 1 April 2012

(Annual estimate £836,000)

- (a) Estimate at 31 December 2012 - £627,000
- (b) Total fee income received at 30 September 2012 - £614,000
- (c) Variation – £11,000 below estimate at end of quarter 3.

3) Trees

(To be reported later in 2013 when trees module goes live)

- (a) Number of Tree Preservation Orders made in 2012/13 –
- (b) Number of trees protected by Tree Preservation Orders made in 2012/13 -
- (c) Number of Tree Preservation Orders confirmed in 2012/13 -
- (d) Number of trees protected by Tree Preservation Orders confirmed in 2012/13 -

4) Enforcement

(To be reported only from 1 July 2013 when enforcement module goes live)

- (a) Number of complaints received about alleged breaches of planning control since 1 July 2013 –
- (b) Number of enforcement actions authorised since 1 April 2012 -
 - Enforcement Notices -
 - Breach of Condition Notices -
 - Section 215 Untidy Site Notices –
 - Injunctions –
 - Stop Notices –
 - Prosecutions –

5) Section 106 Obligations

- (a) Value of Section 106 Obligation contributions held at 1 April 2012 - £213,200
- (b) Number of Section 106 Agreements completed between 1 April and 31 December 2012 – 14
- (c) Potential financial contributions from (b) above – £664,000
- (d) Type of Section 106 Obligation contributions secured:-
 - Contribution to meet National Park purposes or duty - 0
 - Affordable housing contribution – 7
 - Transport contribution – 5
 - Education contribution – 2
 - Open Space – 3
 - Libraries – 2
 - Fire and Rescue – 2

- Public Art – 2
 - Environmental Improvement – 3
 - Community Facilities – 3
 - Recreation Space – 2
 - Recycling - 2
 - Other contribution – 5
 - Restriction – 2
 - Rescission of earlier permission - 0
- (e) Other Financial Contributions to EHDC during period – 13 (Total value £75,500)
- (f) Sum released from Section 106 Obligations so far in 2012/13 - £50,000

6) Complaints Received about the SDNPA Planning Service

- (a) Number received since 1 April 2012 – 26
- (b) (Number received at this stage in previous year – (to be reported from 1/4/13)
- (c) Number dealt with satisfactorily and closed – 25
- (d) Number escalated to higher level – 2
- (e) Number of complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman – None (0)
- (f) Number currently being investigated – 0
- (g) Number of compliments received since 1 April 2012 - 11

PART B:

HOST AUTHORITY AND SDNPA PERFORMANCE

7) Planning application activity by authority since 1 April 2012

Authority	Number Received	Proportion validated at first attempt	Proportion submitted through Planning Portal	Proportion validated within 5 working days	Number of cases invalid at 30 December 2012	Proportion of decisions made in time (Q1 & Q2)
Adur & Worthing	12	92%	50%	83%	0	25% (20%)
Chichester	1,039	41%	37%	44%	12	43% (30%)
East Hampshire	602	61%	55%	37%	11	60% (43%)
East Sussex	11	100%	100%	91%	4	No decisions
Hampshire	4	100%	50%	100%	0	50% (0%)
Horsham	128	58%	49%	96%	0	69% (75%)
Lewes	563	67%	48%	91%	3	81% (84%)
Mid-Sussex	51	35%	61%	82%	1	68% (50%)
South Downs RPS*	289	54%	36%	56%	3	45% (34%)

West Sussex	8	75%	63%	25%	1	0% (0%)
Winchester	481	86%	42%	52%	6	47% (45%)
TOTAL	3,188	58%	44%	56%	41 (33)	55% (48%)

*Service for those parts of Arun, Brighton and Hove, Eastbourne and Wealden District that lie within the South Downs National Park, plus 10 other recovered cases.

8) Types of applications by decided by authority since 1 April 2012

Authority	Majors	Minors	Others	Total
Adur & Worthing	0	2	6	8
Chichester	4	117	613	734
East Hampshire	8	95	325	428
East Sussex	0	0	0	0
Hampshire	1	0	1	2
Horsham	1	17	77	95
Lewes	3	41	331	375
Mid-Sussex	0	6	28	34
South Downs RPS*	4	31	149	184
West Sussex	1	0	2	3
Winchester	1	50	276	327
TOTAL	23	359	1808	2,190

- **Decisions made in time – 1,208 – 55% (48%)**
- **Number of cases where value was added – 287* - 13% (3%)**

*Please note that this field was only completed in a small number of cases up to 30 November 2012. It became mandatory from 1 December 2012 onwards and the number of cases where value is added will, therefore, be much higher from then.

9) Applications approved, refused and withdrawn by authority since 1 April 2012

Authority	Approved	Refused	Withdrawn	Total
Adur & Worthing	5	3	0	8
Chichester	615	82	37	734
East Hampshire	356	41	31	428
East Sussex	0	0	0	0
Hampshire	2	0	0	2
Horsham	78	12	5	95
Lewes	347	17	11	375
Mid-Sussex	28	4	2	34
South Downs RPS*	170	9	5	184
West Sussex	3	0	0	3
Winchester	291	23	13	327
TOTAL	1,895	191	104	2,190

PART C:

PLANNING POLICY INFORMATION

- (a) Number of joint plans currently under preparation – 5
- (b) Number of joint mineral and waste plans under preparation - 3
- (c) Number of joint evidence studies currently underway – 6
- (d) Number of Neighbourhood Plans being prepared wholly (4) or partially (6) within the National Park - 10
- (e) Number of new homes built in 2011/12 - 212