



## **Internal Audit Report**

### **Development Management Audit**

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Auditor  
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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 From the 1 April 2011 the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) became the sole planning authority for the area of the South Downs National Park. Since this date SDNPA placed some of its development management planning functions through agency arrangements with local planning authorities that have a part of their areas within the National Park, Chichester District Council (CDC) being one of these local planning authorities.
- 1.2 The current agency agreement between the SDNPA and Chichester District Council was signed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2014 and runs from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2017.

## 2 Scope

- 2.1 The scope for this audit review was agreed to ensure that:
- The processes for development management planning services for the SDNPA were identified and documented.
  - Development management planning service processes for CDC (i.e. non SDNPA) were documented for comparison but were not tested during this audit. A separate audit of this area will be undertaken at a later stage.
  - The areas of planning enforcement and section 106 agreements for the South Downs National Park were not be covered in this audit.

In addition, testing was undertaken of planning applications for the SDNPA to identify and test that income is properly accounted for and that:

- a) CDC use the SDNPA IDOX Uniform administration system to register and validate all South Downs National Park applications,
- b) adequate documentation is available to support planning applications,
- c) each application has a unique reference,
- d) the correct fee has been charged,
- e) the case report and decision for the planning application has been signed off by the planning officer concerned and authorised by a senior officer or at Planning Committee,

- f) the relevant fee income has been received by the SDNPA and
- g) there are adequate procedures to support processes.

### **3 Findings**

- 3.1 A sample of 25 planning applications was chosen at random from 2015/16 year to date.
  - 3.1.1 The entire sample tested had a unique reference number.
  - 3.1.2 The process for the recording of fees has recently changed to make it easier for the reconciliation of income to be undertaken. Since May 2015, the SDNPA email out reports showing the transactions that they receive for every type of payment from all local authorities. These reports are issued on a daily and weekly basis. The SDNPA have now requested that all local authorities acting as agents for them enter the user analysis number from these reports against the relevant receipt number field in Uniform. This then identifies that the fee has been received by the SDNPA and enables all fee income to be reconciled more quickly at each quarter. It was confirmed for all but one application that the SDNPA had received the appropriate fee. In the exception, a SDNPA report was missing and was requested from the park. This report has now been received and receipt of the fee by the park has been confirmed.
  - 3.1.3 Evidence was found for 24 of the 25 planning applications tested, that the case officer report had been appropriately signed by the planning officer concerned and authorised by a senior officer or had been approved at Planning Committee. In the only exception, there was no signature by the planning officer concerned, although there the application had been completed correctly.
- 3.2 Over the past 18 months the SDNPA have issued the relevant procedures and guidance covering the use of the Uniform system and planning administration. The issue of guidance for a recent change in procedures was also evidenced. It was noted that procedures, such as the pre-application procedure manual for Uniform, require updating for where SDNPA cheques are sent, that is, the SDNPA Head Office in Midhurst which moved from Petersfield in May 2014.
- 3.3 Access to the SDNPA Uniform system is limited to authorised planning staff. The number is controlled by the SDNPA. The system is hosted by IDOX and they have responsibility for ensuring data protection and business continuity.
- 3.4 It was established during the audit that CDC hold the relevant insurances as required in the S101 agreement with the SDNPA.
- 3.5 The current S101 agreement was reviewed by senior staff including legal staff prior to its renewal in April 2014 and was approved by Cabinet. It was noted

during the audit that the current S101 agreement between CDC and the SDNPA states that 'each party shall review the agreement at least annually and report its findings to the other. The parties shall pay particular attention to the effectiveness of the arrangements, costs, income, expenditure, performance and decision making.' The annual review for the year ending April 2015 is overdue; the Head of Planning Services stated that a meeting has now been booked to take place on the 5th October 2015.

In addition, the Head of Planning Services indicated that performance is discussed informally via meetings held on a quarterly basis at the Planning Working Group, which includes staff at the SDNPA and various host authorities. Both paper and electronic files of agenda's and minutes of these meetings were provided. The latest SDNPA report found on file relating to the development management performance of host authorities, including CDC, was dated October 2014. This covered performance for the first quarter of 2014/15 (1 April 2014 to 30 June 2014). Therefore nothing was formally recorded from July 2014 to date.


## 4 Conclusion

- 4.1 Overall, controls appear to be working satisfactorily in relation to SDNPA planning applications handled by the CDC development management team. The evidence for performance monitoring could be improved and so a recommendation has been made, along with a couple of lower priority recommendations. (See Action Table at Appendix 1).
  - 4.2 In order to prioritise the issues raised, the following traffic light indicator has been used:
  - 4.3 Red – Significant issues to be addressed
  - 4.4 Amber – Important issues to be addressed
- Green – Minor or no issues to be addressed

## 5 Action Plan – Appendix 1

Paragraph Ref	Recommendation	Officer	Priority	Agreed?	Comments	Implementation Date
<b>3.5</b>	Planning Services should keep documentation of any future reviews and the results of its own performance reviews and reviews made by the SDNPA (in accordance with the agency agreement) so these reviews can be evidenced in future follow up audits.	Andrew Frost, Head of Planning Services	●	Yes	Review meetings are driven and requested by the SDNPA. The next meeting is in October and notes will be taken.	<b>30.11.2015</b>
<b>3.1.3</b>	It is recommended that staff be reminded to authorise planning applications and to keep documentation to evidence this.	Andrew Frost, Head of Planning Services	●	Yes	A reminder (via email) will be sent to all relevant staff.	<b>31.10.2015</b>

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<b>3.2</b>	Procedures are updated to reflect the change in address of the SDNPA offices.	Sam Carter, Administration Manager, Development Manager		Yes	This recommendation has been agreed and the procedure has been updated.	<b>Completed</b>
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