

THE E-PLANNING COMPACT

"Agreement on the E-Planning Compact confirms a common approach to modernising planning service delivery in Scotland through the use of the internet. I am delighted that local authority planning services and the Executive have been able to co-ordinate work on the development of E-Planning in this way. We all want to see an effective and accessible planning service in every part of Scotland, and it is of importance that we share our experience in the application of information technology and agree on milestones for the delivery of a high quality and effective electronic planning service."



Mary Mulligan MSP: Deputy Minister for Communities

An agreed strategy to develop effective, high quality and citizen-focused planning service delivery, fit for the 21st century

The aims

- *To enable people to get involved in planning*
- *To increase openness, efficiency and effectiveness*
- *To arrange the delivery of planning service to meet citizens' needs*

The task

1. With the support of The Scottish Executive and the Executive's Inquiry Reporters Unit (SEIRU), planning authorities deliver planning service in Scotland under the terms set out in law, policy and advice. SPP 1: *The Planning System* and a range of other Scottish Planning Policies, Planning Advice Notes and other guidance shape the outlines of the service. As the Executive signalled in its 2001 consultation *Getting Involved in Planning* and subsequent White Paper *"Your place your plan"*, many aspects of service delivery now need to be updated and made more responsive to the needs of citizens and business. This e-planning compact has been drawn up as the basis of co-ordination between central and local government to develop effective high quality and citizen-focused planning service delivery, fit for the 21st century.

Citizen-facing services, round the clock

2. 21st Century government demands efficient public services which are citizen facing, allowing for greater choice and convenience of access. For the planning service this means structuring the process, making the best use of new technology so that people have access to the information they need and can get involved in a way and at a time that suits them. The Government is committed to getting more people involved in planning the future development of their area.

3. Instant round-the-clock access to relevant and up to date planning policies, advice or general information can encourage investment and empower involvement. Greater use of technology in planning can also help to reduce duplication and achieve economies of scale, for example by sharing information between organisations. The electronic submission of planning applications and appeals can save time and paper, allowing people who are interested to track progress and make comments online.

Targets

4. The UK Government has set an overall target that 100% of all public services which can feasibly be provided online should be available by 2005. There is also a drive towards electronic storage and management of new records by that date. This **e-planning compact** sets out the elements of a high quality service that we can all work towards. It extends to development plans, general advice and policy information and the processing of planning and related applications and appeals, along with other important elements of the planning service.

Channels for service delivery

5. Electronic systems should provide a platform for access by a range of communication channels to suit different needs and preferences, in particular:

- **Local offices** where face to face contact is possible;
- **Assisted telephone services** e.g. through dedicated enquiry lines or call centres; and
- **Internet** for electronic access to planning services and information.

6. Where desirable, technology can support other communication methods such as kiosks or digital TV, for use when people have no access to the internet, and mobile telephones allowing people to access and receive information easily including application decisions. Parallel paper systems must continue to be retained to maintain choice and prevent the exclusion of those who do not wish, or are not able, to interact electronically.

Sharing and standards

7. There is huge potential to improve the planning service through better use and sharing of information. **Information and Communications Technology (ICT)** provides the opportunities, but they must be properly harnessed. A more consistent approach to using and presenting planning information can help to provide a better service to the citizen. In the longer term, sharing information should help to improve its

quality. It should also lead to better-informed public involvement in planning, decision-making and investment.

8. Recognising this, the **e-planning group** was formed by the Scottish Executive and planning authorities in 2001 to start to transfer information and experience in this field, discussing progress, resolving common problems and exploring software and service options. The group has allowed local authority planning service delivery champions to gain from each other's approaches to information technology. And it has encouraged them to work together in tackling some of the challenges that lie ahead.

9. The **Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act (2002)**, expected to be implemented in 2005, introduces a statutory right to access information held by Scottish public authorities subject to a number of exemptions. A key aspect of the Freedom of Information legislation is the focus on proactive dissemination of information. Local authorities should consider their information holdings and look at how this information can be shared and made publicly available. While FOI legislation will create new rights to access information, it does not cut across other legislation. Therefore, restrictions on storing and using personal information under the **Data Protection Act**, for example, will not be removed by FOI legislation.

10. The **e-Government Interoperability Framework (e-GIF)** aims to facilitate electronic links between all partners in the planning process. Planning data should be integrated and presented using the Government's e-GIF formats e.g. XML schemas. These schemas will allow individuals, community bodies and businesses to interoperate with the systems of other public and private bodies, for example allowing planning applications to be submitted electronically, with the data being automatically entered into local authority development control systems. This will remove the need to scan or re-enter information.

11. **Geographic Information Systems (GIS)** are a powerful spatial tool which can help to inform the development of planning policies by overlaying statistical information with planning application details, development constraints and development plan designations. Development plans prepared on a GIS basis can be clearer and easier to understand than traditional methods and can support moves towards a more consistent style of presentation across Scotland.

12. **Portals** are internet points of access for structuring information and services around the needs of citizens. A Focus Group of representatives from the Scottish Executive and local authorities considered the benefits, risks and practicalities of developing a Scottish Planning Portal, and reported to Scottish Heads of Planning in June 2003.

13. **ICT Suppliers** have been developing casework, internet and GIS software to support the electronic submission of applications and give online access to progress information and development plans. These increasingly provide local authorities with the means to offer co-ordinated planning services.

14. Supported by the second phase of the Scottish Executive's **Modernising Government Fund (MGF2)**, the **Definitive National Addressing project for Scotland (DNAS)** by local authorities and others will join up information holdings through

common geographic references. This can form the basis for land based surveys such as the Annual Housing Land Supply Audit, Employment Sites Register and Vacant and Derelict Land Register. The project will support a consistent approach to addressing and to the development of local authority back-office ICT systems to enable greater integration and to support other applications such as information and service portals. The essential connection between the DNAS project and the work to co-ordinate e-planning services in Scotland is well-understood by all involved.

A compact for co-ordination and partnership

15. In June 2003 **Scottish Heads of Planning** agreed to work together to progress e-planning. Scotland should not join the Portal developed in England and Wales by the Planning Inspectorate, for the time being, nor should we develop a similar system for Scotland. Instead, there should be incremental steps to strengthen local provision, enhance existing websites and improve links between planning service and information providers at all levels. The Executive's planning homepage should become Scotland's main point of access to information on planning and links should be provided to direct users to the right planning authority website. Some common information should be made available at a Scotland level to ensure consistency and allow authorities to focus on their own online planning services. Although no national gateway for submitting applications online is envisaged at this stage, Heads of Planning considered that application forms should be agreed nationally and made available online with online help. Meanwhile councils should continue to develop their development control casework systems and provide online access to relevant information held there, either through internal IT support or the private sector. Each authority should decide for itself the best way to scan its applications and place them on the web.

16. Heads of Planning agreed that the **e-planning group** should continue in its co-ordinating role and its expertise should be used to develop advice in an electronic e-planning Advice Note. They also proposed that this **e-planning compact** -developed by the group- should be the basis for a shared approach between the Executive and the planning authorities, and that all should work together to deliver the online information and services specified, co-ordinating their efforts in a current programme of action.

17. All stakeholders in the planning system will have to co-ordinate their efforts to deliver an effective planning service: citizens and community groups; developers and agents; the Scottish Executive; local authorities; suppliers; statutory consultees; and amenity bodies. The specific responsibilities of the Scottish Executive, local authorities, and the e-planning group, including the need to engage with these wider stakeholders, will be as follows.

18. As part of this **e-planning compact**, the **Scottish Executive will:**

- co-ordinate action on e-planning across Scotland and disseminate best practice to local authorities
- work to remove legal impediments to electronic service delivery
- continue to provide up to date national planning policy, information and advice online and consider how this information could be enhanced or expanded

- continue to involve and consult on policy making wherever possible, with access from a range of communication channels
- develop an online citizen's guide, with FAQs
- establish citizen and business needs for an electronic planning service
- accept and process electronically planning appeals and planning and related applications notified to Scottish Ministers
- Executive will develop a planning authority search facility with hyperlinks to planning authority websites
- Executive will place development plans progress online
- Executive will work with authorities and software providers to consider the best way of placing development plans on the web

19. For their part, each of the **local authorities will:**

- focus the delivery of the planning service on the needs of citizens
- look at the scope at quality of planning related information which they hold and consider the most effective ways of sharing it and making it widely accessible
- set out a strategy for the use of information technology in delivering the planning service, involving staff at all levels and making links with other land and property related functions in the local authority, for example, building control, environmental health and transport
- drawing on the key elements in the programme of action, set milestones for the delivery of a high quality and effective electronic planning service by 2005, ensuring access to planning services and information by a range of communication channels
- make use of GIS for development plans and in linking statistical and spatial information with planning applications data, to inform policy and decision making
- work toward greater consistency in planning authority homepages, in line with recommended standards and targets
- make their development plans available online
- work with others where possible to achieve economies of scale and prevent duplication

20. As agreed, the **e-planning group will:**

- continue to help to co-ordinate and deliver an effective planning service through new technology, exploring opportunities and problems, links to related services like building control, and regularly exchanging information on progress and good practice
- report to Scottish Heads of Planning on progress, setting up, monitoring and regularly rolling forward a current programme of action for e-planning based on the objectives and outcomes set out in this compact
- co-ordinate closely with the board steering the planning theme of the DNA Scotland project, which will play an important role in improved service delivery

The objectives

21. The current programme of action will vary as milestones are passed and are replaced by new ones. But the shared vision promoted by this compact includes the following agreed objectives for a high quality and effective citizen-focused planning service:

General information

- Internet Planning page (each planning authority, SE and SEIRU)
- Mutual electronic links between local and national internet pages
- Readable e-planning material in plain English and to Royal National Institute for the Blind standards
- Up to date online planning information, guidance notes and advice appropriate to each level
- Links to heritage and design information
- Opportunities for electronic feedback from users
- Supported telephone helpline for general planning enquiries

Development control

Applications

- Downloadable application forms
- Online submission of planning and related applications
- Online payment of planning application fees
- Opportunity to comment on applications online
- Online tracking of application progress
- Online application decisions
- Online weekly list
- Online Planning Register
- Online submission of enforcement complaints

Appeals

- Downloadable appeals forms
- Online submission of appeals
- Online payment of planning appeal fees
- Online tracking of appeals progress
- Online appeals decisions

Development planning

- Online development plans
- View development plans on a GIS base, highlighting constraints
- Opportunity to comment on development plans online
- Link to aerial photography
- Link to all relevant planning information for each address