



Audit, Resources and Performance Committee 20 March 2015
Item 10 Appendix 3

PDNPA Minerals Planning 2014-15

Peak District National Park Authority

Internal Audit Report 2014/15

Business Unit: Planning
Responsible Officer: Director of Planning
Service Manager: Minerals Team Manager
Date Issued: 05 March 2015
Status: Final
Reference: 69170/001

	P1	P2	P3
Actions	0	0	1
Overall Audit Opinion	High Assurance		



Summary and Overall Conclusions

Introduction

There is a statutory legal basis for planning, the town and country planning act 1990. This sets out what sorts of developments need planning permission. National Park Authorities (NPAs) also have a separate set of legislation in order to be able to keep NPA status.

There are general permitted development orders, which set out certain forms of development which do not need specific planning permission, but NPAs have reduced permitted development.

All planning decisions should be in accordance with the development plan except with good reason - the PDNPA local plan states that no new mineral permissions will be granted except in very exceptional circumstances.

There are different types of minerals operations - mining and quarries, but also processing to make the product suitable for the relevant market. These have different planning requirements.

The planning authority also has ongoing responsibility for monitoring permissions, and taking any enforcement action where necessary. There can be dormant sites that still have valid permission. Planning authorities can review the permissions with a view to seeing if the conditions attached are still relevant.

Objectives and Scope of the Audit

The purpose of this audit was to provide assurance to management that procedures and controls within the system ensure that:

- all planning applications are processed in line with the Authority's own guidelines, the local development plan and relevant legislation
- any enforcement activity is in line with legislation
- all ongoing permissions are monitored where required including dormant sites

Key Findings

The key findings from the audit are that processes are generally working well.

For planning applications, in the sample reviewed all relevant documents have been received and are available for public viewing and the stages identified by officers have been followed. There are appropriate procedures in place for the authority to satisfy itself that they do everything possible to avoid decisions going to appeal. This is backed up by the small number of current appeals.

There is a comprehensive pre-application checklist in place, and it is easily available to the public. Officers offer and give pre-application advice (which is indicated on the application form) and for the sample examined, everything that should have been present was so.

Results for the number of planning applications processed within specified timescales are submitted to the government quarterly and published on the gov.uk website. The data for the 24 months to September 2014 shows the authority as determining 63.4% of applications within the target timescales, which is well above the national target of 40%.

The process for enforcement is delegated to officers and appeals follow a statutory route and although not as often as stated in the service plan, there are regular quarterly meetings between planning and legal services where the caseload is discussed and priorities determined including enforcement.

There is a documented strategy for minerals planning and while the strategy is some years old, the objectives and subsequent actions are still very valid. Documentation on individual planning applications shows that the authority still meets the majority of those objectives.

One area for improvement is that while there is a program for monitoring visits throughout the year, there is a minor weakness in recording of income from those visits received by Planning. Income that has been received is captured inconsistently on the spreadsheet used. As the information is easily found on the finance system, that part of the spreadsheet is pointless and creates a misleading impression of income received.

Overall Conclusions

It was found that the arrangements for managing risk were very good. An effective control environment appears to be in operation. Our overall opinion of the controls within the system at the time of the audit was that they provided **High Assurance**.

1 Recording of Income

Issue/Control Weakness

Inconsistent recording of income

Risk

Misleading information may be produced

Findings

The site visiting spreadsheet also includes the date invoiced, the invoice number and details of payment. There are some invoices that appear to have been outstanding for some months. The spreadsheet calculates income generated is £6951 but at the date it was provided (January 2015) it was recorded on the spreadsheet that only £662 had been received. When a visit has been carried out, a request is sent to finance to raise an invoice. Finance is then responsible for chasing income due as part of their debt recovery process.

These 'outstanding' invoices have been checked with finance and all but one has been paid. The one outstanding invoice SI25794 has been referred to Legal and a letter before claim was sent out on 12/1/15.

As information on income received is easily available from the finance system, this part of the spreadsheet is somewhat redundant and misleading

Agreed Action 1.1

The site visiting spreadsheet will be restricted to noting the invoice reference number only to prove that the invoice has been raised.

Priority

3

Responsible Officer

Minerals Team
Manager

Timescale

31/03/2015

Audit Opinions and Priorities for Actions

Audit Opinions

Audit work is based on sampling transactions to test the operation of systems. It cannot guarantee the elimination of fraud or error. Our opinion is based on the risks we identify at the time of the audit.

Our overall audit opinion is based on 5 grades of opinion, as set out below.

Opinion	Assessment of internal control
High Assurance	Overall, very good management of risk. An effective control environment appears to be in operation.
Substantial Assurance	Overall, good management of risk with few weaknesses identified. An effective control environment is in operation but there is scope for further improvement in the areas identified.
Reasonable Assurance	Overall, satisfactory management of risk with a number of weaknesses identified. An acceptable control environment is in operation but there are a number of improvements that could be made.
Limited Assurance	Overall, poor management of risk with significant control weaknesses in key areas and major improvements required before an effective control environment will be in operation.
No Assurance	Overall, there is a fundamental failure in control and risks are not being effectively managed. A number of key areas require substantial improvement to protect the system from error and abuse.

Priorities for Actions

Priority 1	A fundamental system weakness, which presents unacceptable risk to the system objectives and requires urgent attention by management.
Priority 2	A significant system weakness, whose impact or frequency presents risks to the system objectives, which needs to be addressed by management.
Priority 3	The system objectives are not exposed to significant risk, but the issue merits attention by management.

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