

ANGUS COUNCIL

PLANNING AND TRANSPORT POLICY COMMITTEE
DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE

17 OCTOBER 1996
24 OCTOBER 1996

SUBJECT: SIGNPOSTING POLICY - PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF PLANNING, TRANSPORT & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Abstract: This report outlines the subsequent planning implications and considerations, of the Council adopting the new Tourism Signposting Policy presented in the previous Committee item.

1 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee adopt the following recommendation in principle but subject to any amendments subsequently brought forward as a result of further consultation in the context of the emerging Angus Local Plan.

- a) that businesses eligible for signs under the new Tourist Signposting Policy, will be obliged to erect 'formal' signs. In such circumstances, planning applications for individually designed signs will normally be refused;
- b) signs previously erected by eligible businesses will be allowed to remain in place as long as they are of an acceptable standard and condition, until 2001 but replacement signs must be of the formal variety;
- c) that the policy towards existing signs will be reviewed in 2001; and
- d) the planning policy on signs in the countryside (Advice Note 7) will be reviewed and presented to a subsequent meeting of the Committee, taking into account the new Tourist Signposting Policy and other inputs.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The previous item (report 859/96) considered by the Committee, jointly prepared by the Director of Roads and Director of Planning, Transport and Economic Development, resulted from the relaxation on tourism signing offered by the Scottish Office in the context of Circular 27/1995.
- 2.2 The Tourism Signposting Policy, if accepted by the Council, will make it possible for tourist related businesses to erect considerably more signs than is possible at the present. In addition, more general signs advertising the features and facilities of individual settlements and areas will be permitted. Because standardised signs are to be used, a consistency and quality will result which should ensure such signing being effective without being unduly visually damaging to the fine Angus landscape.

- 2.3 The policy presented in report 859/96 is wide-reaching and comprehensive but does leave a number of issues still to be resolved in respect of certain planning implications.

3 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS/ISSUES

- 3.1 If adopted by the Council, the new Tourism Signposting Policy will offer an alternative source of obtaining approval to erect signs. At present relatively few formal signs relating to tourist facilities are approved and erected through the Roads legislation, the majority falling within the ambit of Planning legislation. This will now change and, in theory at least, the majority of tourist related signs will be encompassed by the new policy implemented through Roads legislation. If signing is sought through the new policy, planning permission will no longer be required.
- 3.2 The new policy, however, does not cater for every potential requirement for signing, e.g. facilities not meeting the Quality Assurance Scheme standards of the local Tourist Board, businesses that are not members of the Tourist Board and rural facilities less directly related to tourism (e.g. most shops). Signing of these premises will only be possible through the planning system. The policies operated by the District Council and "inherited" by Angus Council, are contained in Advice Note 7 - Advertising in the Countryside. This document will require revision to accommodate the provisions of the new policy on Tourism Signposting.

Flexibility of Implementation

- 3.3 For signing businesses that are eligible for the new standardised signs there are two options available:-
- a) permit them to continue to erect individually designed signs within the limitations of planning legislation and Council policy; or
 - b) insist on the erection of the new standardised signs.
- 3.4 The new policy offers the Council an opportunity to permit a far greater number of signs in a controlled and consistent fashion. Signs will be constructed to the same high standard and general appearance and will become recognised by tourists as of tourism relevance. Rules on siting, number of signs, etc. will also be consistently applied. However, these signs will not be inexpensive and given the opportunity, many tourism businesses may opt to erect their own signs, usually of poorer quality and having no consistency with the 'formal' tourism signs.
- 3.5 Not to make the new signs compulsory will defeat a number of the objectives of the relaxation, namely the high standard of consistently designed and located signs which will become automatically recognised as of interest to tourists; the ability of the countryside to accept more signs because of their higher, consistent standard; and the opportunity the new system offers to control the quality of signed facilities (through Tourist Board membership and quality schemes) to the benefit of visitors to and reputation of Angus.

- 3.6 It is apparent from guidance provided by the Scottish Office, that signs eligible under the new policy are intended to be compulsory and that other signs sought through the planning system should not be accepted as an alternative. The guidance states that advertising signs obtainable through the planning system "are not a substitute for brown Tourist Signposting and should not be necessary if an effective local Tourist Signposting Policy is implemented".

ACCORDINGLY (b) IS THE PREFERRED OPTION.

Businesses not Eligible

- 3.7 A number of businesses of tourist relevance may not be eligible because they do not meet the criteria necessary, most particularly are not members of the local Tourist Board or do not meet the quality assurance levels. If the erection of the new formal signs is made compulsory for qualifying businesses, then this could encourage these non-qualifying businesses to meet the criteria to the benefit of all concerned. Irrespective a policy for their signing will be required and two options are available:-

- a) no signing allowed outwith the "permitted development" rights granted by planning legislation, i.e. signs erected within their own immediate curtilage; or
- b) permit erection of signs but only within the limitations of the planning legislation and Council policy.

If formal signs are to be made compulsory for eligible businesses to adopt option (b) would accord preferential treatment to non-eligible businesses. Adopting option (a) would encourage non-eligible business to join the Tourist Board, improve standards and secure more (formal) signing.

ACCORDINGLY (a) IS THE PREFERRED OPTION TO ENCOURAGE IMPROVED STANDARDS.

Businesses not Covered

- 3.8 A number of businesses of less direct tourist association but possibly justifying some form of directional or advance signing, are not covered by the new policy, e.g. rural shops and, therefore, will remain within the ambit of planning legislation. This is considered in Section 4 below.

Existing Signs

- 3.9 A further issue relates to existing signs which will rarely comply with the requirements and standards of the new policy. Some businesses may welcome the opportunity to replace existing signs with new 'formal' signs but the majority will probably not seek the additional expenditure and will retain existing signs, in some instances, until they disintegrate.

- 3.10 Under planning legislation, signs receive consent for only five years after which the Planning Authority can seek their removal, accordingly no signs are permanent. In addition many signs have been erected without any planning consent and they can be challenged at any time.
- 3.11 A number of options are open to the Council in respect of existing signs:-
- a) they can be left in place until replacement is sought;
 - b) they can be left in place until their deteriorating condition justifies challenge and replacement with 'formal' signs;
 - c) they can be challenged after five years (i.e. in 2001) but in the meantime no new consents would be granted, except for 'formal' signs;
 - d) they can be challenged from the date the new policy is adopted, once any five year consent has expired; and
 - e) various combinations of the above, e.g. (a) and (c).

THE PREFERRED OPTION IS A COMBINATION OF (a), (b) AND (c).

- 3.12 Under this option existing signs would be allowed to remain in situ for up to five years. All replacement signs or renewals would only be allowed if the new formal standard and deteriorating or unauthorised signs would be challenged.

4 PLANNING POLICY

- 4.1 It should be apparent from the above that tourist related signing complying with the Tourism Signposting Policy, will fall outwith the planning legislation leaving only a minority of signs relevant to the Council's current policy as contained in Advice Note 7 - Advertising in the Countryside, e.g. rural shops.
- 4.2 Under these circumstances it will be necessary to revise Advice Note 7 but it would be premature to do so in the absence of Council decisions on the adoption of the Tourism Signposting Policy and the planning issues it raises, as discussed above.
- 4.3 Nevertheless, some months ago, following adverse publicity in respect of two planning refusals for signs at Newtyle, some members felt the policy should be reconsidered, and a review was commenced. In fact the only significant "problem" created by the policy, which for many years had operated very successfully, was in connection with the signing of facilities within villages, particularly the erection of signs at village entry points.
- 4.4 One input into the policy review must be the recent appeal decision (reported at the last Development Control meeting) at Newtyle requiring the removal of signs erected at the entrance to the village which had been the subject of the aforementioned refusal. Account would also need to be taken of the policy review consultation response from Tayside Police:-

".....the aspect of road safety is of paramount importance. What must be avoided is a proliferation of such signing which would detract from the relevance and significance of traffic signing. Taking into account the aforementioned the Police are of the opinion that business signing at the roadside on the entrance to settlements should be avoided".

- 4.5 It is possible that the needs of less prominently located rural shops, etc. could be met by the Council adopting a more flexible approach to the erection of signs on Council property, particularly footpaths. This could enable local business or community organisations or individual businesses to erect directional signs avoiding village entry situations. Such a proposition would need careful consideration in conjunction with the Director of Roads, as would other suggestions such as information points in lay-bys on the approaches to settlements.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no significant additional financial implications in the adoption of the recommendations.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Chief Executive, the Director of Roads, Director of Finance and Director of Law & Administration have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The relaxation of tourist signing offered by the Scottish Office presents the Council with an opportunity, not only to permit the signing of more facilities than in the past, but in a way that will be visually acceptable, will provide an integrated and instantly recognisable tourist signing network and will also ensure quality of product.
- 7.2 This could be jeopardised if the option to seek planning consent for non-standardised signs through the planning system is retained (except for non-eligible businesses) or existing deteriorating signs are allowed to remain indefinitely.

NOTE

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report.

AA/JJ/KW/IAL
8 October 1996

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