

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & PARK DIRECTION AND OF THE
FUNDING AND GRANTS OFFICER**

**SUBJECT: TO PURCHASE LAND AS PART OF THE SUSTAINABLE
LANDSCAPE SUSTAINABLE PLACES FUNDING FOR NATIONAL PARK
CARBON SEQUESTRATION AND SUPPORTING BIODIVERSITY**

Purpose of Report

To present a recommendation to Members on the purchase of circa 30 acres land at Trefin as part of the Welsh Government-funded Sustainable Landscape Sustainable Places (SLSP) portfolio of projects to enhance biodiversity and carbon sequestration.

Introduction/Background

Funding from Welsh Government's Sustainable Landscapes, Sustainable Places Funding (SLSP) was approved in June 2020 to support a number of proposals for decarbonisation in the National Park. The proposal, '*Land purchase for Sequestration for the Nation*' was approved with a budget of £200,000 plus £20,000 management / delivery costs to be delivered by March 2021. The aim of the proposal is to support carbon sequestration and to increase biodiversity through increasing the area of land under perpetual favourable management for National Park purposes through land purchase by the National Park Authority

The Authority's Conserving the Park Scheme is currently the Authority's main means of nature conservation. Through the scheme, officers working with land managers to offer management agreements, facilitate grazing, and provide, capital grants and advice, amongst other measures.

The National Park Authority's asset management policy includes the objective that the NPA will hold the minimum estate necessary for delivery of Park purposes. Welsh Government's climate emergency declaration and continued declines in the state of nature - with land management identified as a major influence on both - suggest that the NPA should hold more land in trust for this and future generations. National Park Management Plan policy E1 (j) is to "Acquire or lease sites of actual or potential nature value where this is a cost effective management option."

Reasons for land purchase included in the SLSP bid include:

- Conservation / restoration of natural processes e.g. hydrological function, flood amelioration
- Nature experiences – e.g. a meadow or woodland for every community in the Park
- Soil conservation, food security
- Heritage and landscape

It is noted that woodland expansion is a UK and Welsh Government priority and an effective means of carbon sequestration. However, scope for new woodland or even woodland extension is limited in this National Park. This is because of much of the land area is under active agricultural management or already of other habitat value. An appropriate sequestration strategy for this National Park is therefore the safeguard and restoration of a broad range of habitats, such as hay meadows. While these other habitats may sequester less vegetative carbon than woodland, they can occupy larger areas.

Policy Context

This proposal sits within a wider policy context which recognises the need for bold action to address the interconnected nature of the global challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss as highlighted in Natural Resources Wales' (NRW) 2019 Interim State of Natural Resources Report.

The South West Wales Area Statement, published by NRW, notes that:

- “We need to work with natural systems and processes to help adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change; for example by exploring natural flood management solutions, increasing green infrastructure in urban areas and promoting carbon capture via natural systems, e.g. peat bogs, woodlands, kelp and sea grass”

The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales in The Future Generations Report 2020 included the following recommendation for public bodies:

- Considering and taking action to address the climate and nature crisis together.
- Restoring forests and peatland and more sustainable land-use to protect nature.

The Welsh Government has a target for the Welsh public sector to be carbon neutral by 2030 and its Valued and Resilient Written Statement highlighted green energy and decarbonisation as one of the priority areas for National Park Authorities.

The proposed land purchase will help address carbon sequestration, biodiversity loss and provide nature experiences. The land purchase will support, for example:

- National Park Management Plan 2020-2024 Policy N1: “Contribute to a low carbon economy for Wales and adapt to climate change.” The proposal is identified as one of the action areas in the Management Plan action plan “Responding to the Climate Change Emergency” (approved June 2020) under “We are supporting biodiversity and conservation projects and schemes that also enhance and protect Carbon Sequestration and Stores in the Park.”
- Authority’s Well-being Objectives: Global - To ensure our work makes a positive contribution to global well-being. Resilience – Improve the health of the National Park’s ecosystems. Communities: To encourage communities to become more engaged with the National Park.
- Public Service Board project on Carbon Neutral Pembrokeshire

Identification of suitable site

After thorough research and investigation by officers across the National Park Authority into various land purchase opportunities both on and off the open market, the site at Trefin has been prioritised. Early this month officers narrowed the land opportunities down to 9 suitable sites and prioritised them according to;

- Current or former management within the Conserving the Park scheme (e.g. management agreement), or proximity to such land
- Size
- Conservation and Carbon value
- Access for management
- Location to a community
- Price
- Woodland potential
- Ease of purchase within funding timeframe

Officers' unanimous conclusion was to prioritise the land at Trefin. Of the options, the land was considered to deliver the best outcomes for biodiversity and carbon storage whilst also delivering on location and access for management and providing potential opportunities for community use and enjoyment. The cost of the land falls within the SLSP grant budget and the land purchase can be completed by the delivery deadline of the end of March 2021 as per the requirements of the grant.

Purchase will enable the National Park Authority to help safeguard the future of the land at Trefin in terms of:

- Creating a contiguous strip with our existing block of coastal strip land Trywn Llwyd
- Restore a mixture of coastal grassland, species-rich grassland, scattered scrub and boundary features for the benefit of a whole range of typical coastal species.
- Becoming a demonstration site for coastal resilience through the delivery of multiple benefits in the coastal hinterlands
- Increase the resilience of the coastal habitats by buffering the coastal strip from adverse impacts and increasing the size and connectivity of the coastal habitat network.
- A rough estimate of the carbon benefit of restoring improved grassland (at an existing value of 60tC/ha) to a mixture of coastal grassland, species-rich grassland, scattered scrub and boundary features is an additional 6 tonnes carbon / hectare. Thirty acres (12 hectares) could therefore result in additional sequestration of 72 tonnes of carbon. It is suggested that an appropriate pre- and post-restoration evaluation of carbon benefit should be performed.

Although the headline carbon storage for woodlands is higher there is a lot research to suggest that grasslands are more stable carbon stores than woodlands and do not come with the problem of carbon release on establishment (as with woodland creation). Grassland carbon storage is very appropriate for our National Park landscape. In addition the management of the land in this way will raise awareness of grassland carbon storage.

The land at Trefin was being offered for sale in the open market at a quoting price of £250,000. Following a period of negotiation we have agreed terms to purchase the freehold of the land at a price of £200,000 subject to NPA approval. External valuers have been instructed to provide their opinion of the land's open market value and they have reported a valuation of £200,000 which supports our negotiated purchase price and the Welsh Government's requirement to demonstrate best value in the use of public funds.

The land has minimal agricultural value and is land that can make more of contribution to conservation than food production. This could be linked to possible changes in Welsh Government schemes in the future to support agriculture, where financial contributions are going to be linked to the production of public goods. Therefore we could use this as a process of learning to inform our approach in the future.

Financial considerations

On-going financial liabilities relate to the maintenance of grazing infrastructure.

£10,000 has been identified for fencing as part of the approved Dawnsio ar a Dibyn Sustainable Management Scheme project to assist with rollback for the coastal belt if required.

There is a requirement to spend the £220,000 allocated by the Welsh Government by 31st March 2021, otherwise this funding will be returned.

Ownership can be cost-effective in the long run and provides management assurances. There are potential revenue advantages to ownership e.g. potential grazing fees. There may also be income potential in future from public goods schemes.

Risk considerations

If the purchase is not approved or does not go ahead there is a risk of having to return the funding to Welsh Government.

The purchase represents an opportunity to have a significant positive impact on carbon sequestration and on biodiversity gain in the National Park.

Compliance

The proposed purchase would align with the National Park purposes, the National Park Management Plan 2020-2024 (including actions within the Plan's associated Responding to the Climate Change Emergency Action Plan, and the Authority's Well-being Objectives.

The proposal takes into account the sustainable development principles of the Well-being of Future Generations Act:

- Long term / Prevention: The purchase of land at Trefin by the National Park Authority will begin a new approach to carbon sequestration in the Park and

enable land to be managed in perpetuity for biodiversity and carbon sequestration with positive benefits for current and future generations

- Integration: Will support delivery of National Park Management Plan, Authority's Well-being Objectives and external priorities of Welsh Government, Well-being of Future Generations Commissioner and other Public Bodies.
- Collaboration / Involvement: Will provide engagement opportunities through nature experiences and conservation activities with communities and volunteers.

The acquisition proposal is part of a wider strategy the Authority is considering to increase the area of land under perpetual favourable management for National Park purposes, to halt the loss of biodiversity, which links to long term aims of our Corporate Plan.

The recommendation contributes to the carbon neutral aspirations of the National Park Authority and Welsh Government and fulfilment of the Section 6 Duty and implementation of the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources principles under the Environment Wales Act 2016.

Human Rights/Equality issues

Through providing nature experiences the land at Trefin can be used for wider health and well-being activities related to accessing the outdoors. This will support the wider work of the Authority, including social inclusion and health related activities. In the context of COVID 19, it will provide an opportunity for people who need nature-rich places to rehabilitate to access this close to their homes.

Biodiversity implications / Sustainability appraisal

The proposal offers significant potential for improving biodiversity in the National Park, by enhancing coastal grasslands, species-rich grassland, coastal scrub and boundary features. It would increase opportunities for the Chough and farmland birds, as well as pollinators, as the land is along the National Park's coastal "bee lines".

Welsh Language considerations

None identified.

Conclusion

The proposed purchase of the land by the National Park would begin a new approach to improving biodiversity and carbon sequestration in the National Park and enable land to be managed in perpetuity for biodiversity and carbon sequestration with positive benefits for current and future generations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. Members endorse purchase of the land at Trefin, with immediate effect.**

- 2. Delegated authority is sought for the Chief Executive and Chair to pursue purchase of alternative site/s in the event this one doesn't proceed.**

Background Documents

- [PCNPA - Responding to the Climate Change Emergency Action Plan](#)
- [NRW - State of Natural Resources interim report 2019](#)

(For further information, please contact Jessica Morgan / Nicola Gandy)

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