

OPERATIONAL REVIEW COMMITTEE

16 December 2020

Present: Councillor K Doolin (Chair)
Councillor P Harries, Mrs J James, Councillor PJ Morgan, Dr R Plummer and Councillor S Yelland

[Dr M Havard and Councillor A Wilcox joined the meeting during the presentation on Management of the Coast Path and Public Rights of Way Network (Minute 4 refers)]

(Virtual Meeting: 10.00am – 11.45am)

1. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor ML Evans. Dr M Havard and Councillor A Wilcox had advised that they would be joining the meeting late.

2. Disclosures

Dr R Plummer disclosed a personal, but non-prejudicial in report 17/20 - Performance Report for the Period Ending 31st October 2020.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 23 September 2020 were presented for confirmation and authentication.

A typographical error was noted in the second paragraph of Minute 6 – the first sentence should have referred to the risk of virus attack not attach. Also in the penultimate paragraph on page 5 of the minutes (Minute 8 Performance Report) the reference to an influx of planning applications due to a fee increase should have read in advance of a fee increase. However the Member went on to say that these were minor corrections and, on the whole, she wished to record her compliments to the officers concerned on the quality of the Authority's minutes.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2020 be confirmed and authenticated subject to the above amendments.

4. Management of the Coast Path and Public Rights of Way Network, Post Lockdown 2020

In the absence of the Access and Rights of Way Manager, the report was presented by the National Trail Officer and the Rights of Way Officer. They reminded Members that on 24th March the Authority had closed large sections of the Pembrokeshire Coast Path under the Welsh Government emergency powers, and noted that full scale closure of the Coast Path had not been undertaken since the Foot and Mouth Outbreak



in 2001. They explained that the reason for the decision was to reinforce the message that Pembrokeshire was closed to visitors, however the inland path network had remained open to provide residents with opportunities to exercise on their doorstep. Compliance with the closure had been generally good, nevertheless, the authority was made aware of issues such as trespass and non-compliance with Government guidelines. Concerns had been expressed by some landowners who hosted public rights of way which passed close to dwellings and signage had been provided to provide guidance for walkers and allay their concerns. Re-opening the path was important for the economic recovery of the county and much work in terms of risk assessments and vegetation control measures had to be undertaken before this could take place on 29 June.

The officers went on to explain that there were seven concealed counters on the coast path which had provided data since 2006 and these showed a 94% reduction in use during April and May, but very high use of the path over the summer. September in particular saw a large increase of users compared to 2019. Detailed figures were included in the report, and these demonstrated the importance of the coast path to the economy of the National Park and its value to residents.

Thanking the officers for an excellent report and congratulating them on their response to the pandemic, some Members stated that they were nevertheless not in favour of a blanket closure of the coast path and asked about coordination and communication between the different agencies in Wales prior to the decision, and any lessons learned as a result.

The Chair of the Authority noted that the Chief Executive had been in close contact with him prior to taking the decision, and also with the other National Park Authorities. The Chief Executive agreed that the three Welsh National Parks in particular had worked closely together, and also with Natural Resources Wales, Local Authorities, Cadw, etc. However he noted that although he was happy with the decisions that had been taken, with hindsight the extensive closures put in place might not have been necessary.

Members also commended the use of signage and the discussions that had taken place with landowners, and stated that the lockdown had highlighted the importance of rights of way network. They also appreciated the way officers had communicated key decisions to them in a timely manner.

NOTED.



5. The Impact of COVID-19 on Visitor Services

The Director of Countryside, Community and Visitor Services reminded Members that in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all PCNPA buildings had closed and staff were supported to work from home wherever possible. This included virtually all of the Visitor Services teams who initially worked from home, but who were ultimately furloughed (either fully or partially) until the visitor attraction sites were re-opened in July.

The report presented the catastrophic drop in visitor numbers, reflecting the 50% drop in tourism activity across the National Park, as well as the physical adaptations that had to be undertaken in order to welcome back visitors, albeit at a much reduced capacity. Retail operations had also had to be reviewed, reducing the amount of stock, in order to better manage the flow of visitors. However the sites had continued to provide support to local businesses by stocking their products for sale. There had also been community initiatives to attract local residents to enjoy the attractions while they were quieter than normal.

The Oriel y Parc team had continued to work with Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales in finding solutions to opening the gallery in a Covid-safe way. Much of the wider exhibition space had also been reopened to support local artists in displaying and selling their work.

One of the real areas of success during the pandemic had been the implementation of an online ticketing system for both Castell Henllys and Carew Castle to support the 'Test, Trace and Protect' response in Wales. Lessons learned would be valuable in running ticketed events across the Authority's work in future.

Despite being able to off-set the majority of lost income, the Authority had taken the decision to temporarily close both Carew Castle and Castell Henllys until 2021 in order to minimise losses. Further revised COVID-19 regulations had since come into force in Wales and as a result Oriel y Parc was also closed. However the teams had started to plan for next season, and learning from new approaches that had been safely tried and tested, including the hosting of virtual events, the activities and events programme for 2021 was now being planned.

The Director paid tribute to the dedicated staff who had worked hard to implement the safety changes and feedback to the control measures had been universally well received across all sites.

Members thanked the Director for a helpful paper and asked that Members' thanks be passed on to staff and volunteers. The Chair of the Authority advised that he would liaise with the Director to send out an



acknowledgement to Dinah who had been mentioned specifically in the report.

Members also noted the importance of team work and noted the references to new approaches to visitor engagement in future. The Director replied that a number of pop-up events had been trialled, promoted on the morning of the event with online booking and this approach was proving positive.

NOTED

6. Presentation of Archaeology Day 2020 Evaluation Results

The Community Archaeologist gave a presentation evaluating the 2020 Archaeology Day organised in conjunction with Planed. Between 160 and 190 people had watched the event live and the individual presentations were still available on the YouTube channel with over 3.7k views to date. 38 Feedback forms had also been returned, and these showed that the talks had been well received. The majority of viewers were from Pembrokeshire, however some had joined from elsewhere in the UK and possibly from abroad also, meaning that the event had been attended by people who would not normally have been able to attend in person. The feedback had suggested there was an appetite for the event to be delivered physically and virtually in future, with participants valuing the ability to network and also to access the book stalls and exhibitions usually available.

Overall the event had been positive, and had led to increased understanding and engagement and a number of lessons had been learned which would be applied to future events. Donations to the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Trust had been encouraged in lieu of paid attendance, and £310 had been received in donations which it was hoped could be put towards archaeology work in the National Park.

The Activities and Events Coordinator was also present at the meeting and she explained that during lockdown, the Authority had gained experience in holding virtual events. More virtual events were planned on other subjects, such as birds and geology which would allow the Authority to reach out to a wider audience.

The Chair of the Authority noted that he had attended on the day and wanted to congratulate the team on an excellent event. Other Members noted that although they had not been able to attend, they had viewed some of the presentations since which had been a fantastic opportunity. It was suggested that greater use could be made of this, and other digital resources by students and visitors to the area. They believed that this was an innovative idea which had helped raise awareness of the National



Park, and hoped that a blended approach (physical and virtual event) would be possible in the future.

NOTED.

7. Performance Report for the Period Ending 31st October 2020

The report followed the structure of the Corporate and Resources Plan for 2020/21. The Plan was in two parts - the first section was based on progress against short and mid-term priorities focused on the Authority's COVID-19 response and recovery planning, while the second section outlined progress against work streams that contributed to the longer term delivery of the Authority's Well-being Objectives and impacts within the National Park Management Plan. This section going forward would provide insight into the impact of COVID-19 and recovery on long term delivery and projects across well-being objectives.

It was reported that some activities within work streams might be progressed during 2020/21, however a number of them, particularly those involving face to face contact between individuals, might not be able to progress until restrictions were partially or fully lifted. In some cases this would mean that activities under some work streams might not be carried out during 2020/21.

The report presented the performance to 31 October 2020 for monthly data and quarter 1 – 2 (April – September) statistics for some data sets. An explanation of the RAG (Red Amber Green) status had been appended to the report.

The report outlined the impact of the initial lifting of restrictions, with the re-starting of adapted face to face services in several areas, in accordance with risk assessments, as well as the impact of the firebreak period during October/November. It also went on to report the impact of COVID 19 measures on the planning system with the percentage of all planning applications determined within time periods required ytd showing a red RAG rating, significantly below target at 46.77%. This situation had been made worse by a significant IT issue which had impacted on the registering of new planning and related applications. Although this had now been resolved, it was anticipated that there would be an impact on Q3 statistics.

The implementation of the new telephone system was also noted and this had helped support home working and communications. Additional phases to include the three centres would be implemented in 2021.

In addition the report outlined some of the work that had been undertaken towards progressing long-term objectives.



Members were happy with what they felt to be a helpful and easy to read report and were confident that officers were addressing the issues that had been identified. In response to a question, the officer advised that she had not been in communication with the zero carbon hub at the Centre for Alternative Technology and any contact that could be provided would be welcome.

NOTED

8. Risk Register

Members were asked to consider the latest Risk Register. The Finance Manager advised that it had been reviewed by both Management and Leadership Teams and changes since the previous report were highlighted.

Members thanked the officer for the narrative that had been included, which they had found helpful. They made a number of observations, and asked that consideration be given to reviewing risk 40 to reflect the decision at the recent Authority meeting to appoint a new Data Protection Officer; risk 47 to reflect the fact that planning and preparedness for pandemic was now much improved, although the pandemic itself was not under control; and finally the mitigation provided in respect of risk 49 be re-worded. They also asked for an update with regard to succession planning and the Authority's ability to recruit staff, and this was provided, the Chief Executive advising that the Authority's greatest vulnerability was where a single officer was a specialist in their area of work.

NOTED

9. Continuous Improvement Group: delegation of issues

It was **RESOLVED** that there were no issues that needed to be delegated to the Continuous Improvement Group for consideration.

10. Thanks

The Chair wished to thank the Democratic Services Team for their help and support over the year, the Chair of the Authority and the Chief Executive for their leadership and timely communication of information and to all Members for their contributions to the meeting. He also wished to thank all officers and staff who don't appear at meetings of the Authority as well as all the volunteers. He hoped everyone would have a safe and good Christmas and that some sort of normality would return in 2021.

The Chief Executive agreed that the staff had done a fantastic job, each contributing in their own ways in difficult and trying circumstances. In recognition of this, the Leadership Team had agreed to give all staff an



additional day at the start of the New Year, with the Authority's offices reopening on January 5th, rather than the 4th.

NOTED.

