

# National Park Authority

16 June 2021

Present: Councillor P Harries (Chair)

Councillor P Baker BEM, Councillor Mrs D Clements, Councillor K Doolin, Councillor M Evans, Dr M Havard, Mrs J James, Councillor M James, Mr G Jones, Councillor P Kidney, Councillor PJ Morgan, Councillor R Owens, Dr R Plummer, Mrs S Hoss, Councillor A Wilcox and Councillor M Williams.

[Dr R Heath-Davies arrived during consideration of the item on the Means of Holding Committee Meetings (*Minute 6. refers*)]

(Virtual Meeting: 10.25am – 11.40am; 11.50am - 1.00pm; 1.30pm – 1.55pm)

## 1. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor S Yelland. Dr R Heath-Davies had advised she would be arriving late.

## 2. Disclosures

Dr R Plummer disclosed a personal but not prejudicial interest in item 25/21 procurement of Carbon Base Line Studies of Designated landscapes as she sat as a Board Member for NRW.

## 3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 5 May 2021 were presented for confirmation and authentication.

In respect of Minute 10 relating to Local Development Plan 2 Supplementary Planning Guidance, one Member asked that it be noted that she had commended Dr Simon Brooks' report in Wales, which had subsequently been circulated to Members, and requested that a workshop on that subject be arranged in future.

The Chief Executive replied that there was a lot of work currently taking place on this issue, meaning that the picture was still evolving. However a Workshop would be arranged at the appropriate time.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 May 2021 be confirmed and authenticated subject to the above amendment.

## 3. Matters arising

Local Development Plan 2: Supplementary Planning Guidance (Minute 10)

It was noted that the Supplementary Planning Guidance documents in respect of Biodiversity and Archaeology, which had been produced jointly



with Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC), were to be considered by PCC's Cabinet following the meeting of the Authority. An update was sought as to whether they had been approved. The Director of Planning and Park Direction agreed to let Members know the Cabinet decision by email.

**NOTED.**

#### **4. Chair's Announcement**

The Chair was disappointed to say that he had still not attended any public functions, however he hoped that with the easing of restrictions that would soon change. He noted that Julie James MS had been appointed as Minister for Climate Change, with responsibility for National Parks, and he had written a letter congratulating her on her appointment and looking forward to working with her; a copy had been circulated to Members. The Chair had also taken part in a number of Personal Development Reviews which had proved useful and painless and he commended the process to all Members, and expressed his willingness to help.

Following the last meeting of the Authority, at which he had been appointed to represent the Authority on the Skomer Marine Conservation Zone Advisory Group, he had attended that meeting and he had been impressed by the range of work undertaken by it. He had also attended the National Parks UK Chairs' Forum as Vice-Chair when subjects including Carbon Net Zero with Nature, COP26 and the Climate Position Statement had been discussed. He offered to update any Member who was interested. Finally he noted that he and the Chief Executive had met the Friends of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park the previous day, with whom the Authority had a good relationship.

**NOTED.**

#### **5. Reports of meetings of various of the Authority's Committees**

The following reports of meetings of a number of the Authority's Committees were presented to Members for consideration/information:

- (i) Development Management Committees held on 21 April 2021 and 10 May 2021.
- (ii) Sustainable Development Fund Committee held on 28 April 2021.
- (iii) Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee held on 12 May 2021

It was noted that Sarah Burns, the Authority's Data Protection Officer, had given a presentation, and it was requested that the slides were circulated to Members who did not sit on that Committee. Also that a Members' workshop be arranged in respect of data protection matters.



It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the above mentioned Committees be noted/adopted/received.

[Councillor A Wilcox tendered his apologies and left the meeting during consideration of the following item.]

## **6. Means of Holding Committee Meetings in the Future**

It was reported that interim statutory guidance on multi-location meetings had recently been published, further to section 47 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. Multi-location meetings were defined as those whose participants were not all in the same physical place. It was reported that in accordance with the 2021 Act, during 2021/22 meetings of the National Park must be multi-location but were not required to be broadcast; however by May 2022 meetings had to be multi-location and broadcast.

The report set out the Authority's current facilities and to what extent they could meet these requirements, and went on to recommend that for 2021/22, once restrictions were lifted, meetings were held in the Green Room or Discovery Room at Oriel y Parc, with Members having the option to attend in person or via Video Conference.

From May 2022 the Authority would be subject to the requirement to broadcast and record meetings. Given the known audio quality limitations due to the construction of both the Green Room at Llanion and Discovery room at Oriel y Parc, alternative options were set out for Members' consideration.

There was a wide ranging debate in respect of the longer term options with voices both for and against replacement of the Green Room, although there was little support for a re-fit of the Planning office due to the disruption this would cause. Questions were asked about the availability of facilities at Pembrokeshire College and elsewhere in the County and officers agreed to make enquiries, however previous investigations had suggested that County Hall was the only location in Pembrokeshire with appropriate equipment. It was suggested that Pembrokeshire County Council may be willing to negotiate on costs if the booking was a regular one, and it was noted that 12 of the 18 Members were able to park for free at County Hall. Some Members, however, did not believe that holding meetings at County Hall was an appropriate solution.

There was general consensus that options for an exemplar replacement of the Green Room should be developed and a further report presented to a future meeting. It was suggested that a report on the Authority's Estates Strategy would also be helpful. It was noted that holding meetings at different locations across the County would be difficult in



future, due to the need to broadcast and the additional technical requirements that it would bring. The hope was expressed that even though the Authority was not required to broadcast meetings until 2022, that this would nevertheless continue when face to face meetings returned.

It was **RESOLVED** that once restrictions were lifted, meetings return to the Green Room, with Members having the option to attend via Video Conference. With regard to the longer term option from May 2022 onwards, officers were requested to develop options for an exemplar replacement of the Green Room to be presented to a future meeting.

[Councillor M Williams tendered his apologies and left the meeting at this juncture]

[The meeting was adjourned from 11.40am until 11.50am]

## 7. **To Extend the Temporary Changes in light of the Impact of Covid 19 to the Authority's Scheme of Delegation**

Members were reminded that in order to enable continuity of the planning service during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, temporary amendments, as set out in the report, had been made to the Authority's Scheme of Delegation. The temporary amendments had originally been proposed in May 2020, and reconfirmed in both July and December 2020; a further temporary extension until 30<sup>th</sup> March 2022 was now sought.

One Member asked that the numbering in the document be looked at to replace bullet points with legal numbering, to aid cross reference. It was also requested that the words "continue to" be added to the recommendation before "temporarily amend the scheme".

While happy to support the extension, another Member asked for data on how effective the amended scheme of delegation had been, noting that some applications that had seemed straightforward had nevertheless come before the Committee. The officer agreed to compile the information and circulate to Members. The Chair of the Development Management Committee advised that if the Community Council and local objectors had strong views contrary to the officer recommendation, he had often asked for the applications to be considered by the Committee for the sake of democracy.

It was **RESOLVED** to continue to temporarily amend the scheme of delegation with regard to planning until 30<sup>th</sup> March 2022.



## **8. Review of the Public Participation Scheme at meetings of the Development Management Committee**

It was reported that the Authority had introduced public speaking at its Development Management Committees in 2002, with the intention of allowing public speaking at one meeting only on each application. Several queries had been raised with regard to public participation arrangements in recent months, and it was considered that the current policy was due to be reviewed. A workshop was held on 19 May 2021 with Members to discuss the matter.

The report proposed to change the current policy to allow an individual who had addressed the Committee on a particular application at a previous meeting, to address the Committee again if the application was deferred for any reason to subsequent meetings, for a maximum time of 5 minutes. Other changes to the Guidance for Speakers, such as making explicit the ability of more than one person to share the allocated 5 minutes for public participation at the Chair's discretion, were also set out.

It was noted at the meeting that the report had recommended that any documentation in relation to an application circulated to Members must be submitted 48 hours prior to the meeting, however having received legal advice it was requested that this point be deleted as any material information had to be considered irrespective of when it was received.

The recommendation was moved and seconded, subject to the amendment noted above and a number of suggestions aimed at improving the clarity of the Guidance document, including wording to make it clear that there was no public speaking at Site Inspections. An amendment was then proposed that, rather than five minutes, a maximum of three minutes should be given to an individual who was addressing the Committee at a subsequent meeting, and that new information only should be presented, rather than a repetition of points made previously. Further amendments to the Guidance were also suggested, and due to the number of amendments put forward, officers advised that it may be better if the Guidance was revised to take on board the points made at the meeting and brought back to a future meeting of the Authority for approval.

The Chair of the Development Management Committee said that he believed that changes were also needed to the protocol to be followed when Members wished to take a decision contrary to the advice / recommendation of officers ("the cooling-off procedure") and asked that a working group be set up to discuss this. Officers agreed to arrange a meeting with the Chair/Deputy Chair of the Committee in order to discuss the matter further, prior to a report being presented to Members for consideration.



It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) an individual who had addressed the Committee on a particular application at a previous meeting shall be permitted to address the Committee again if the application was deferred for any reason to subsequent meetings, for a maximum of three minutes, provided only new material was to be presented;
- b) the guidance document in respect of public participation at Development Management Committee meetings be re-drafted, taking account of Members' comments, and presented to a future meeting of the Authority.

## **9. Procurement of Carbon Base Line Studies of Designated Landscapes**

It was reported that the Authority along with the seven other Designated Landscapes in Wales had been invited to submit proposals for the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) Grant scheme run by the Welsh Government. A total of £4.5 million was available, and through an agreement across the eight Designated Landscapes and Welsh Government, 10% of this funding was allocated for collaborative projects.

One of the projects the Authority submitted for the collaborative element of the fund was to commission a Carbon Baseline Study of the eight Designated Landscapes. This was based on discussions with some of the English National Park Authorities, who had commissioned Small World Consulting to undertake a Carbon Audit of their National Parks and recommendations on action to take to create carbon neutral landscapes by 2040. These reports would provide options for future proposals for SLSP projects and enable the eight Welsh Designated Landscapes to act collaboratively on working towards this target. In addition, by using this methodology, it would enable experience and good practice to be shared with English National Parks. It was estimated that the total cost of this work would be in the region of £60,000 and the Authority was proposing to contract for this work on behalf of the eight Designated Landscapes.

Under the Authority's approved Contracting Standing Orders 2020 contracts over £25,000 required three tenders to be invited. If the Authority issued an open tender, it was likely that any other organisation or company would propose a different methodology and then this would have an impact on the Authority's ability to collaborate, share information and learn from the experiences of English National Parks.

Another alternative would be for the Authority to commission its own report and then ask the seven other Designated Landscapes to commission their own report. However, this would increase the bureaucracy relating to the project and reduce the Authority' ability to manage the project.



In view of this, Members were asked to suspend the Contracting Standing Orders 2020 in relation to commissioning Carbon Audits for the eight Designated Landscapes.

Most Members were happy to suspend Contracting Standing Orders 2020 in this instance, providing due diligence had been undertaken as expected in any single supplier selection, as it would promote partnership working and support Designated Landscapes across Wales. One Member, however considered that the procurement rules should be followed.

It was **RESOLVED** that Contracting Standing Orders 2020 be suspended in relation to commissioning Carbon Audits for the eight Designated Landscapes in Wales.

[Councillor M Evans tendered his apologies and left the meeting.]

[The meeting was adjourned for lunch between 1pm and 1.30pm.]

#### **10. Welsh Language Standards Annual Report**

Members were reminded that the Authority was required to comply with the Welsh Language Standards Compliance Notice issued to it under Section 44 of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. Standards 158, 164 and 170 of the Compliance Notice required an Annual Report to be produced by 30 June every year and the report for 2020/21 was presented for Members' consideration.

Members welcomed what was described as a positive and comprehensive report, with the increase in staff undertaking Welsh language training being particularly pleasing, however it was noted that there was still room for improvement. Officers were asked to consider including a few additional points in this or future reports and it was suggested that impact assessments, particularly in respect of Language Sensitive Areas set out in the Local Development Plan, could be included under section 3.3 Policy Research; also that increased promotion of the ability for speakers at the Development Management Committee to address the Committee in Welsh could be included in Section 5 as there was little detail in respect of the promotion standards. The opportunity for virtual meeting technology to facilitate simultaneous translation could also be added. With regard to the decrease in the number of staff with basic spoken and reading/writing skills noted at paragraph 4.6.2, it was noted that it was often a question of confidence, with employees often able to speak a little Welsh. Nevertheless this was an area to keep under review.

In addition, a typographical error was noted at paragraph 1.4 in respect of the period covered by the report.



It was **RESOLVED** that the Welsh Language Standards Annual Report be endorsed as the Authority's submission to the Welsh Language Commissioner subject to the changes set out above.

#### 11. Adoption of the Business Case for a Digital Workplace

Members were reminded that in December 2019, they had been presented with a paper that outlined two IT licencing options. These were to move to Microsoft 365 licences, at what was expected to be an annual cost of around £48K or to stay with Office 2019 on-premises licence and incur a one-off cost of £108K, which was expected to cover the period up to 2025. At that time, it was considered that the Authority was unlikely to make a full use of the functionality of Microsoft 365 and therefore Members approved the recommendation to stay with the Office 2019 option.

However, the situation had changed significantly over the previous 15 months, due to the requirement to hold virtual meetings and an increase in digital ways of working. In addition there were increasing challenges in respect of cyber security and changes to certain programmes such as APAS, the system used by the Development Management team to manage applications, which meant that the Authority was unable to fully utilise their functionality.

A re-evaluation of IT systems had therefore been undertaken, and a review of the suitability of Microsoft 365 in particular was outlined in the report. Recent analysis had also identified that there were two types of licences, based on requirements and use, and the significant differences made of IT by staff in different roles would enable the Authority to reduce its annual costs for Microsoft 365 licenses to around £25,000 annually. This cost reduction had also been assisted by the original investment to upgrade the Authority's servers. A move to Microsoft 365 would also see a reduction in cost of use of other systems, leading to potential savings of between £10,000 and £25,000.

Members were happy to support a move to the new platform, particularly due to its improved data and system security, subject to provision of good training for both officers and Members. A number of Members agreed that they would benefit from training and hoped this could be tailored to individual needs.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Authority move to using Microsoft 365.

