

Report of the Director of Planning & Park Direction

Subject: To purchase land as part of the Sustainable Landscape Sustainable Places Funding for National Park Carbon sequestration

Purpose of Report

To present a recommendation to Members to delegated authority for the Chief Executive to a purchase woodland meadow land as part of the Welsh Government-funded Sustainable Landscape Sustainable Places (SLSP) portfolio of projects to enhance biodiversity and carbon sequestration within the National Park.

Introduction/Background

Funding from Welsh Government's Sustainable Landscapes, Sustainable Places Funding (SLSP) was approved in June 2021 to support a number of proposals for decarbonisation in the National Park. The proposal, '*community woodland meadow*' was approved with a budget of £69,300 plus £7,700 management / delivery costs to be delivered by March 2022. 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.

Whilst 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. Consequently, the National Park Management Plan at policy E1 (j) states the national Park should "Acquire or lease sites of actual or potential nature value where this is a cost effective management option."

The reasons for land purchase in the SLSP bid included:

- 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 safeguarding and restoration of a broad range of habitats, such as wood meadows.

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

During the last round of SLSP (2020/21) the National Park was awarded funding for land purchase for carbon sequestration. After thorough research and investigation by Officers across the National Park Authority into various land purchase opportunities

both on and off the open market, a site was prioritised. At this time several smaller plots were identified as excellent locations, with good access, conservation value, carbon value and high opportunity for community orchard/ woodland. As they were substantially smaller in size than originally applied for, they were not pursued further.

A few of the smaller parcels of land identified for woodland and woodmeadow in 2020/21 butted up to existing woodland and were also in close proximity to communities, providing an excellent opportunity for woodland expansion or woodmeadow creation and community engagement.

The SLSP funding for 2021/22 allows for the purchase of a small site for the purpose of:

- Creating a woodland or woodmeadow - becoming a demonstration site for community woodland/ woodmeadow
- Carbon sequestration
- Connectivity for wildlife - increase the resilience of woodland and meadow habitats and connectivity of species
- 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
- Heritage and landscape

Woodland expansion is a UK and Welsh Government priority and is an effective means of carbon sequestration but scope for new woodland or even woodland extension is limited in PCNP.

A rough estimate of the carbon benefit (calculation of increase in soil carbon) is 5 tonnes per hectare. If the site is 5 acres, that's approx. 2 hectares, therefore 10 tonnes additional carbon in the soil (whole site). With the addition of planting trees; another 70 tonnes per hectare planted (when the trees are at maturity).

The Authority is currently in discussions with landowners exploring the opportunity of purchasing a suitable site.

Financial considerations

Land identified will be independently valued and will be purchased at a price only that presents value for money.

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

There is a requirement to spend the £77,000 allocated by the Welsh Government by 31st March 2022 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 by the National Park Authority will continue an 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 purchased 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 may 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 woodland meadows, woodland and/or species-rich grassland. .

Welsh Language considerations

None identified.

Conclusion

The proposed purchase of the land by the National Park would add to the approach of 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 delegated authority for the Chief Executive and Chair to pursue purchase of a suitable site with immediate effect**

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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