

**REPORT OF ADMINISTRATION & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER AND
BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT & IT MANAGER**

SUBJECT:

**NPA MEETINGS: VENUE OPTIONS DURING MEETING ROOM
REDEVELOPMENT**

1. Purpose of Report

To seek Members' views on the venue for convening meetings of the National Park Authority (NPA) and its Committees while the current meeting room is being redeveloped.

2. Introduction/Background

Members will recall the report of the Business Improvement and IT Manager to the NPA meeting of the 16th June 2021, in which were set out a number of options for holding multi-location meetings pursuant to Section 47 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. Members resolved at that meeting to task officers with developing options for a replacement meeting room and, at their meeting held on the 15th September 2021, a decision was made to replace the room completely. As a result of this decision, and the strong indication from Members that they would like to return to face-to-face meetings, it is necessary to consider options for hosting NPA meetings while the current meeting room is out of commission (possibly from September 2022 onwards, if the redevelopment project goes to plan).

3. Available options

Three possible options present themselves:

- (a) The Discovery Room and adjoining St Davids Room (to accommodate any public wishing to attend) at Oriel y Parc;
- (b) The Meeting Chamber/Committee Room at Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC), and
- (c) The Pater Hall, Pembroke Dock.

In considering these options, the practical/technical requirements necessary, and the ability of each venue, to host multi-location meetings are listed below.

Requirements	Oriel y Parc	PCC	Pater Hall
Room for at least 20 people to sit around a table	✓	✓	✓
Room for members of the public to attend	✓ (in adjoining)	✓	✓

	St Davids Room)		
Sufficient Wi-fi bandwidth to allow video conferencing and livestreaming, Members and Officers to access online agenda and papers, etc	✓	✓ (livestreaming only possible in Chamber, not Committee Room)	Confirmation awaited at time of writing the report
Large screen for Video Conference and officer presentations	✓	✓	No. All equipment would have to be provided by the Authority*
Availability**	✓ (except for DM Committee on 06/09/22)	✓	✓

* This would involve at least two of the IT team having to transport an 86" display screen (which is not designed to be repeatedly transported to other locations), plus microphone equipment and associated paraphernalia to the Pater Hall for each meeting. There would also be a need for one member of the IT team to remain at the venue in case of technical problems, all of which would result in significant disruption to the IT service and the associated "hidden" costs involved.

** Only NPA and Development Management Committee dates have been taken into consideration for the purposes of this report (see 5(a) below).

4. Other factors

There are other factors that need to be taken into consideration as they will also impact on the suitability of each venue:

- (a) COVID-19 restrictions: at the time of writing this report, restrictions are still in place, although Welsh Government has indicated that these could be lifted on the 28th March, if current circumstances do not drastically change. However, as a responsible employer we will continue to be required to develop and implement a risk assessment to ensure that all meetings are held safely. In the short term it is likely that, to manage the risk, a degree of social distancing will be appropriate and therefore it is possible that it will be difficult to permit ALL Members to attend a meeting at Oriel y Parc at the same time, and possibly not in PCC's Committee Room either.
- (b) Livestreaming meetings: there are a number of issues involved with this. Firstly, all Authority meetings have been livestreamed since 2020 and Members need to consider whether this should continue to be the case going forward. While Section 46 of the Local Government and Elections

(Wales) Act 2021 does not require National Park Authorities to broadcast any meetings at all, officers are of the opinion that it would be a retrograde step to stop, as livestreaming enables members of the public to view meetings of the Authority from afar, making them more accessible to a wider audience while ensuring decisions are open, accountable and transparent to stakeholders.

Should Members decide to continue to livestream, a further question is whether the meetings should be recorded and retained for future viewing (as is the case with the majority of local authorities). All three venues would allow for this but, if livestreaming were to continue, it is proposed to do so via YouTube onto an Authority channel. This will be possible if Oriel y Parc or the Pater Hall are used, and this issue is being explored with PCC, as that authority uses a different streaming system. However, PCC indicate that there is an alternative option to have a branded/micro-site at a one-off cost of circa £650 (2019/20 guideline) or to have a link set up on our webpage.

5. Issues to be considered

- (a) Should all of the Authority’s meetings be held face-to-face? It has previously been mooted by Members that Authority and Development Management Committee meetings should be held in this way, with all other Committees continuing to be held remotely until the new meeting room is available. There are 7 Authority and 7 Development Management Committees scheduled between September 2022 and June 2023 while, if all meetings were to be held face-to-face, this would result in an additional 18 meetings having to be accommodated, which would significantly increase costs, particularly if held in non-Authority venues. It should also be noted that the availability of all three venues for the additional 18 meetings has not been explored for the purposes of this report.
- (b) Do Members wish to maintain social distancing when seated “around the table” and can the Authority put in place suitable arrangements to manage risk without a degree of social distancing?
- (c) Should livestreaming of meetings continue? If so, should they be recorded, with the recording being retained for future viewing, as do many local authorities? If livestreaming were to continue, the Committee Room at County Hall would not be suitable, only the Chamber.

6. Financial considerations

Venue	Cost
Oriel y Parc	Using this venue could result in a potential loss of income to the Centre at a cost of £90 per day per room. Refreshments would cost £2 per head. There would also be an increase of circa £180 per meeting, plus car parking charges, in Members’ travelling expenses.
Pembrokeshire County Council	The cost of hiring the Chamber and necessary equipment is awaited although, as a guideline, a 4 hour meeting based on 2019/20 charges would be:

	<p>Chamber hire: £117 per day Webcast (@ £128.50 per hour) – £514 Webcasting operator (@ £41.50 per hour) – £207.50 (includes initial set up and post meeting archiving recording). Total cost per meeting = £838.50, not including refreshments. This would be offset by a reduction of circa £6 per meeting in Members’ travelling expenses. An update will be provided at the meeting.</p>
Pater Hall	<p>Room hire is £14 per hour = £98 per meeting (taking into account set-up and dismantling time). This does not, however, reflect the “hidden” costs of taking two members of the IT team away from their work to transport the equipment to the Pater Hall each time, plus one member of the team remaining in the meeting in case of technical problems. There would be a slight increase in Members’ travelling expenses as Members would need to pay for car parking (unless they parked in Llanion and walked into town).</p>

Note: Most officers could continue to attend meetings remotely, cutting down on staff down-time and additional travel expenses.

7. Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal

Face-to-face meetings would incur a cost in terms of carbon footprint, although Members would still have the option of attending remotely if they so wished. As previously stated, officers could attend remotely, which would continue to have a positive impact on carbon footprint reduction as a result of reduced travel.

8. Welsh Language considerations

Members of the public have always, and will continue to have, the ability to address the Development Management Committee through the medium of Welsh (whether in person or remotely), with appropriate notice as set out in the guidance.

9. Conclusion

Taking all the factors into account, the Pater Hall presents the lowest cost option (but has the highest impact on the IT service and, consequently, associated “hidden” costs), while Pembrokeshire County Council’s Chamber provides both social distancing and a managed service (although I am aware that Members have consistently argued over the years that they do not consider hosting Authority meetings at PCC to be an appropriate solution). Oriel y Parc presents a compromise with a reasonable cost and no disruption to the IT service as the equipment will be permanently installed, although social distancing will not be possible. Members therefore have to consider whether the social distancing aspect or cost is the higher priority.

10. **RECOMMENDATION:**

A. That livestreaming continues (wherever the venue) and that meetings be recorded and retained on the Authority’s website for a period of 6 years.

- B. All meetings, with the exception of National Park Authority and Development Management Committee meetings continue to be held remotely.**
- C. Members' views are sought on which venue to use for holding meetings of the National Park Authority and Development Management Committee, if a suitable risk assessment can be developed, while the current meeting room is being redeveloped.**

Background documents

[Report No.22/21](#): Means of holding Committee meetings in future to NPA 16th June 2021

[Report No. 40/21](#): Green Room redevelopment – budget and next steps to NPA 15th September 2021

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