

National Park Authority

30 March 2022

Present: Councillor P Harries (Chair)

Councillor P Baker BEM, Councillor Mrs D Clements, Councillor K Doolin, Councillor M Evans, Dr M Havard, Dr R Heath-Davies, Mrs J James, Mr G Jones, Councillor P Kidney, Councillor PJ Morgan, Dr R Plummer, Councillor A Wilcox and Councillor S Yelland

[Mrs S Hoss arrived during consideration of the minutes of the previous meeting (Minute 3 refers); Councillor R Owens joined the meeting following the Chair's announcements (Minute 5 refers).

(Virtual Meeting: 10.00am – 11.40am; 11.50am – 1.20pm)

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M James and Councillor M Williams

2. Disclosures of Interest

A personal but not prejudicial disclosure of interest was received from Dr R Plummer in respect of reports 10/22, 11/22 and 12/22.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 9 February 2022 were presented for confirmation and authentication.

It was **resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on the 9 February 2022 be confirmed and authenticated.

4. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Chair's Announcements

The Chair noted that although Covid restrictions had relaxed he had attended few face to face events. He had, however, participated in a circular walk around Carningli with the Chief Executive and the Chair of the Friends of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park as a low key commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of the formation of the National Park. Meetings attended had included the Partnership Council hosted by Rebecca Evans MS and Julie James MS, Welsh Local Government Association Council, a Council for National Parks Panel discussion and a short meeting of the Corporate Joint Committee. He advised that a number of planned meetings with the Minister Julie James MS had had to be postponed. Other events had included a virtual lecture by the



Authority's Archaeologist on heritage crime and attendance at the "On Your Doorstep" exhibition at Oriel y Parc which he highly recommended. Alongside the Deputy Chair and Chair of Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee, he had also undertaken the Chief Executive's Performance Review. Finally he said that he had listened to the Chief Executive's conversation with Beti George on Radio Cymru which he described as Wales' version of Desert Island Discs.

Noted.

6. Reports of meetings of various Authority 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 26 January 2022 and 7 February 2022;
- (ii) Chief Executive Performance Review Panel held on 21 October 2021;
- (iii) Youth Committee held on 11 January and 8 February 2022;
- (iv) Member Support and Development Committee held on 2 February 2022;
- (v) Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee held on 2 March 2022; and
- (v) Standards Committee held on 2 March 2022.

Members were concerned that numbers attending the Youth Committee appeared to be falling and wished to send their thanks to the youth team – both staff and young people – for all that they were doing, noting that it was important to continue to engage with them. Mrs S Hoss who was the Authority's main representative on the Committee replied that she felt there was good engagement, with many other activities being undertaken through the Youth Rangers and other volunteer groups. Officers were looking at interesting ways of increasing the involvement of young people with the work of the Authority.

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

7. Notice of Motion

The Chair advised that the notice of motion from Councillor P Kidney that "the Authority enters into negotiation with Lamphey Community Council, and any interested parties, to either gift or sell land in Freshwater East, for the provision of a children's play area" had been considered by the Operational Review Committee at their recent meeting. The Chief Executive reported that the Committee had asked officers to discuss the proposal with Lamphey Community Council to gain a better understanding of their plans and report back to them. A recommendation



would then be made to a future meeting of the Authority. Councillor Kidney advised that he was happy with the suggested approach.

Noted.

8. Corporate Plan 2022/23

It was reported that the Corporate and Resources Plan 2022/23 set out the Authority's Corporate Well-being Objectives and Statement, its steps towards reaching those objectives and how it would carry out the sustainable development principles as required under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. It was noted that the Authority was no longer required to produce annual improvement plans, a previous requirement of the Local Government Measure, and this provided an opportunity to take a fresh approach to the plan.

A draft of the Plan had been presented to the February meeting of the Authority for comment and had also been the subject of consultation with staff across the Authority. Amendments had been made as a result of this process, and the Plan was now presented to Members for approval. Appended to the document were the external responses received on the well-being Objectives, which had been the subject of a consultation exercise in early 2022; how the objectives linked to the Next Generation (Youth Committee/Youth Rangers) vision for the National Park; and a summary of the Integrated Assessment for the Plan.

Members thanked the officer for an excellent report and for taking account of the suggestions made at the previous meeting. They believed that the Plan identified the resources needed for delivery of the Objectives, and noted that development of the Delivery Plans would further support this.

In response to questions from Members regarding work with volunteers with both physical and mental disabilities, the Chief Executive replied that an action plan would be developed to take forward volunteering across the Authority and this would be reported to Members in due course.

It was **resolved** that the Corporate Plan 2022/23, including the Authority's revised Well-being objectives be approved.

9. National Park Authority response to consultations on the Erebus Floating Wind Farm project in the Celtic Sea

It was reported that "Project Erebus" was an offshore floating wind farm to the south west of the National Park in the Celtic Sea. Blue Gem Wind Ltd (the Applicant), had applied to the Welsh Ministers for consent under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989, to construct and operate an offshore generating station and a deemed planning permission for the



associated onshore transmission infrastructure. As a separate statutory process, the Applicant had also applied to Natural Resources Wales (NRW) for a Marine Licence for this project.

The Project comprised up to ten Wind Turbine Generators (WTG) with a total generating capacity up to 100 MW. Each WTG would be housed on a semi-submersible floating platform with a mooring system and a range of foundation options. The offshore export cable, up to 49 km in length, would link the array area to landfall at West Angle Bay, Pembrokeshire. The Project also comprised an onshore export cable and an onshore substation, located outside of the National Park, close to the existing Pembroke Power Station.

It was noted that these were significant developments for which the Authority was a Consultee. Officers had drafted a response to both the Marine Licence application and the Section 36 consent application and these were appended to the report. Members comments were sought on the responses and they were asked to agree the general principles and to delegate to the Director of Planning and Park Direction authority to finalise these on the basis that the Authority was not objecting to the project but was raising concerns.

It was reported at the meeting that since writing the report a response had been received from the Authority's Ecologist which welcomed the onshore mitigations proposed but raised concerns that the offshore element could lead to collisions with sea birds and asked that this be addressed. It was suggested that comprehensive monitoring would also be required. It was proposed to incorporate these comments into the Authority's response.

Members thanked the officer for a thorough and clear presentation. Most supported the responses set out, recognising the challenges associated with the provision of renewable energy. A number of additional points were raised in respect of the impacts on migratory birds which were an environmental and tourist asset, and marine life including fish and marine mammals as well as light from service vessels and other service infrastructure. It was also considered that benefits to the local economy should be sought through employment of local people.

Officers clarified that although they had sought legal advice, they were uncertain whether it would be possible to require landscape enhancement through a S106 Agreement as this was a mechanism of the Town and Country Planning Act, rather than the marine licencing system; it would also be for the decision maker to seek a bond to ensure equipment was removed once it ceased to be operational.



While supporting the recommendation one Member suggested that the fact that the Authority had concerns should have greater emphasis. Officers explained that while there were significant concerns regarding the development, the Authority had to be clear in its response if it was objecting or not, as an objection would trigger a public inquiry. Members agreed that it was not appropriate to express their concerns as an objection to the proposal. The recommendation was proposed and seconded, although not all Members were supportive of the proposals considering the turbines to have a detrimental impact on the National Park and suggesting that a public inquiry might be welcomed by local people.

It was **resolved** that finalisation of the Authority's response to Natural Resources Wales and Planning and Environment Decisions Wales (PEDW) be delegated to the Director of Planning and Park Direction, with the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority NOT OBJECTING to the project.

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

[The meeting was adjourned between 11.40am and 11.50am]

10. Land Purchase as part of the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places Funding for National Park Carbon Sequestration

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

The aim of the proposal was 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. It was noted that woodland expansion was a UK and Welsh Government priority and an effective means of carbon sequestration, however, scope for new woodland or even woodland extension was limited in the National Park as much of the land area was under active agricultural management or already of other habitat value. Officers considered that an appropriate sequestration strategy for this National Park was therefore the safeguarding and restoration of a broad range of habitats, such as wood meadows.

A suitable site of 2.84ha of woodland meadow had now been identified which would provide good connectivity for wildlife, secure community



access and volunteering opportunities and Members were asked to endorse its purchase. Due to the delay in spending the funding, Welsh Government had been kept informed, however officers did not expect to need a long extension.

Although one Member expressed the view that the Authority should not be purchasing land, most Members were supportive, believing that it supported the decarbonisation, biodiversity and community engagement aims of the Authority. Questions were raised regarding valuation of the land, whether it presented value for money, taking account of the social return on investment and wider conservation value and also the need to communicate the benefits of the site to the public once the purchase had taken place. Officers provided reassurance that an independent assessment of the value of the land would be obtained before purchase.

It was **resolved** that the pursuance to purchase a suitable piece of woodland meadow land be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair of the Authority.

11. Procurement of Carbon Base Line Studies of Designated Landscapes

Members were reminded that in June 2021 the Authority had approved the suspension of Contracting Standing Orders 2020 in relation to awarding a contract to Small World Consulting on the commissioning of Carbon Audits. Members gave consent for the Authority to manage a project on behalf of the 8 Welsh Designated Landscapes (3 National Park Authorities and 5 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) to produce Carbon Baseline Assessments for each of the Designated Landscapes. The budget for the whole project was £110,000 and the money was secured from the collaborative element of the Welsh Government's Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places grant. However, while the original paper sought consent for a contract with Small World Consulting for £60,000 the actual cost should have been £82,000. The Chief Executive apologised for the error.

It was **resolved** that funding in relation to commissioning Carbon Audits for the eight Designated Landscapes be increased as set out in the report.

12. Member Remuneration 2022/23

Members were reminded that the remit of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales was to prescribe the salaries and allowances payable to Members by local authorities, including National Park Authorities, in Wales. Its final Annual Report for 2022/23 had now been published, and the main recommendations relevant to this Authority were set out; the new salary framework would come into effect on 1st April 2022.



It was noted that the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales had prescribed the levels of Basic and Senior Salaries referred to in the report; the Authority could not vary these levels. However, Members were requested to determine which posts would be eligible to receive a Senior Salary for 2022/23, the previous restriction of four Senior Salaries that could be paid having been removed. Three posts were currently remunerated; the posts of Chair and Deputy Chair of the Authority, together with the Chair of the Development Management Committee.

One Member asked whether any progress had been made in addressing the tax position of Welsh Government Members in relation to reimbursement of expenses. The Chief Executive advised he had no update, however he would be meeting representatives of other National Park Authorities in the near future and would ask if they had been able to progress matters.

It was proposed and seconded that those posts to be remunerated with a Senior Salary remain as at present. However an amendment was put forward that the posts of Deputy Chair of the Development Management Committee, Chair of Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee and Chair of Operational Review Committee also be remunerated and this was seconded. It was stated that the purpose of remunerating Members was to encourage people from all walks of life to engage in public life and it was felt that paying additional Senior Salaries would further that aim.

Some of the Members who currently fulfilled those roles expressed the opinion that the level of additional work was not sufficient to justify payment of a Senior Salary. It was also suggested that such a decision should be taken as part of wider budget considerations.

A vote was taken on the amendment but this was lost. A vote was then taken on the substantive motion that the posts to be remunerated with a Senior Salary remain as at present and this was won.

It was **resolved** that:

- a) The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Annual Report for 2022/23 be noted.
- b) The posts of Chair and Deputy Chair of the Authority, together with the Chair of the Development Management Committee be remunerated with a Senior Salary.

13. NPA Meetings: Venue Options during Meeting Room Redevelopment

Members were reminded that following consideration of a report at the meeting of the Authority in June 2021 regarding the requirement to hold



multi-location meetings pursuant to Section 47 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, officers had been tasked with developing options for a replacement meeting room and, at the meeting held on the 15th September 2021, had taken a decision to replace the current 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 was necessary to consider options for hosting NPA meetings while the current meeting room was out of commission.

Members had previously suggested that meetings other than the National Park Authority and Development Management Committee could continue to be held remotely until the new meeting room was available and the report had been prepared on this basis. However Members were asked to confirm this arrangement.

Consideration of three alternative venues was outlined in the report – the Discovery Room and adjoining St Davids Room at Oriel y Parc; the Meeting Chamber/Committee Room at Pembrokeshire County Council; and the Pater Hall, Pembroke Dock. Members' views were sought on which venue to use for holding meetings, subject to development of a suitable risk assessment, while the current meeting room was being redeveloped. They were also asked to agree to continue livestreaming meetings

At the meeting, the Administration and Democratic Services Manager advised that while the bandwidth capacity at the Pater Hall was still unknown, the disruption to the IT Team and the risk in moving the equipment to the venue on each occasion did not make this a feasible option. However a response had been received from Pembrokeshire County Council which stated that the costs of using their facilities were broadly as set out in the report, however their IT Team were still considering the options for livestreaming this Authority's meetings via its own YouTube Channel.

Officers also clarified that it was now a requirement to provide for multi-location meetings, therefore any venue used to host an in-person meeting had to have the ability for Members to join remotely. This would limit where meetings could be held in future.

With regard to the livestreaming element of the recommendations, Members were happy that this should continue, however concern was expressed regarding the 6 year time period for retention of the recordings. The Administration and Democratic Services Manager advised that this was an arbitrary figure, as different Authorities kept their recordings for differing lengths of time. It was suggested that the recordings be retained in line with the Authority's data retention policy.



Finally in respect of a venue, one Member suggested that officers explore the facilities available at Saundersfoot Regency Hall as he believed this would fulfil all the criteria, with the advantage of a location that was further east, which might reduce travel costs. Other Members felt that while dependability of connection was essential, it would be better not to enter into fixed contracts with other organisations. Therefore use of Oriel y Parc was the favoured option for many Members. The Chief Executive added that the report only sought Members' views on the venue to be used and as this was an operational decision, it was one that would be taken by officers taking account of those views, and subject to a risk assessment.

It was **resolved**:

- a) That the Authority continue to livestream and record meetings, and that the recordings be retained on the Authority's website in accordance with its data retention policy; and
- b) All meetings, with the exception of National Park Authority and Development Management Committee meetings continue to be held remotely.

14. Thanks

The Chair restated his intention not to stand in the forthcoming local government elections, therefore this would be his last meeting as Chair of the Authority. He said it had been an honour and privilege to serve in that capacity, and also as Chair of National Parks Wales and the National Parks UK Chairs Forum, and to represent the Authority on numerous bodies. Although the restrictions of COVID had meant that his attendance at public functions had been limited, he commended the Authority's response to the pandemic and believed that it had highlighted the value of the National Park to the public. Having undertaken his walk of the Pembrokeshire Coast Path last September, marking 50 years since its opening, he thanked all who had supported him in that endeavour. Finally, he was grateful to the residents of Newport for having elected him as a County Councillor, to Councillor Mrs D Clements for ably supporting him as Deputy-Chair and to all Members past and present for the quality of their debate, wisdom and humour. He also wished to thank the officers of the Authority, particularly the Democratic Services Team, and the Chief Executive for his support, knowledge of the Authority and its role in the community.

The Chair then gave the opportunity to any other Member who was not standing to say a few words, and Councillor P Baker and Councillor K Doolin took that opportunity to thank officers and Members and to say what a privilege it had been to serve on the Authority and to work with such committed and enthusiastic staff.



The Deputy Chair spoke for all Members in thanking the Chair for his commitment and fairness and for the personal support, patience and kindness he had shown. She wished him well for his retirement. The Administration and Democratic Services Manager and Chief Executive added their thanks and best wishes to those who were retiring and good luck to those seeking re-election.

