

## Report of Estates Officer

### **Subject: Update on Use of Land at Traeth Mawr / Newport Sands for the purpose of stopping the Practise of Beach Parking**

#### Purpose of Report

To update Members following the acquisition of the subject land on the 9/5/23.

#### Introduction/Background

At their meeting on the 8/2/23 Members resolved to proceed with the purchase of the subject land for the primary purpose of ending the practise of unauthorised vehicle movements and parking on Traeth Mawr / Newport Sands beach via the installation of lockable barriers. At their meeting on the 21/6/23 Members received a brief verbal update from the Chief Executive outlining our post purchase actions to date and the public's reaction, a proportion of which has been focused on the issue of ongoing accessibility for those with disabilities. Advice on the latter had been sought from Pembrokeshire County Council's Access Officer and a report had been commissioned from an independent specialist Disability consultant.

#### Update

In the immediate post purchase period and pending the installation of lockable barriers, we have observed a relatively high level of compliance from the vast majority of the motoring public. To date, that restriction has been communicated via a campaign of public messaging and the installation of on-site signage (see image below).



PCNPA’s actions have generated a reassuring level of public interest including support and encouragement from many quarters and objections from others. The means of engagement has spanned ‘in person’ meetings with officers, phone conversations, letters, individual emails and use of a range of social media platforms including online petitions.

With reference to the 3 images below, the ‘soft’ management measures outlined above have now been supplemented by the installation of a lockable barrier on the northern slipway ( red dot ) and a boulder on the southern slipway (yellow dot) which provide the ‘hard management’ capacity to fully implement the restriction of all non-essential vehicle access onto the beach in readiness for the main holiday season. It should also be noted that a 5-foot-wide unimpeded means of access ( green arrow) will always be maintained for use by the public over and along both slipways. This is the widest practical gap that can be maintained as any incremental increase in that width would make it progressively more vulnerable to unauthorised vehicular movements.





*'Installed barrier on northern slipway in its open configuration (viewed from the beach looking inland) showing the permanently maintained opening indicated by the green arrow''.*



On the specific issue of disabled access, we have sought the advice of the Pembrokeshire County Council Access Officer and a specialist independent disability access consultant, National Diversity Employment & Advisory Services Ltd. Their respective observations are set out below:

#### *Observations of PCC Access Officer*

- The experience of going to a beach for a disabled person should be about being physically exposed to and present within that environment as far as is reasonably possible, not viewing that same environment from within the confines of a vehicle.
- The design of beach wheelchairs do not accommodate the needs of all wheel chair users which means for some, transferring from their own wheel chair on arrival into a beach wheel chair before continuing onto the sand is not an available option.
- It is arguably more beneficial for a wheel chair user who is restricted to their own bespoke chair to journey as far into the beach environment as the available hard surfaces permit ( which at Newport Sands is presently the toe of the slipways where they abut the sand) rather than being driven some distance across the beach where they would be unable to exit the vehicle

#### *Observations of the Independent Disability Access Consultant (Please refer to Report in full at Appendix 1)*

The consultant's report (which is reproduced in full at appendix1 below) raises a number of salient points:

- It recognises and accepts that any ongoing provision of disabled vehicular access onto the beach is potentially incompatible with the overarching objective of a 'vehicle free' natural environment.
- To mitigate that adverse impact, any provision would need to be extremely limited in scale.
- It is a reasonable expectation that any future provision would be materially different from the pre-existing practises.
- The existing beach access infrastructure would need to be assessed and adapted to ensure it was safe and fit for purpose before any beach parking offer could reasonably be offered to meet the essential needs of disabled people.

Due to the safety issues outlined in the 'risk considerations' section below, it would be unreasonable and unrealistic to encourage or promote ongoing disabled beach parking for the foreseeable future. It is suggested the sustainable opportunity and challenge is to actually look beyond making provision for vehicles, towards an exemplar disabled access solution which connects the individuals to and provide movement between, the natural beach environment and beach head car park.

#### Financial considerations

Significant investment has been made in the site both prior to and since it was acquired by PCNPA. This has been essential to deliver the Authority's primary objective of restricting unauthorised vehicle movements onto and across the beach,

including the practise of 'overnighting' and to ensure the quality and safety of people's beach experience at Traeth Mawr.

### Risk considerations

The Authority's assessment of the risks at Traeth Mawr highlight that it is presently unsafe for vehicles to access the beach (including disabled users) due to a range of issues (e.g. mixing pedestrians with vehicles via a shared access point, the need to improve the slipway infrastructure, vehicles not being insured on the beach, the adverse environmental impact of vehicles etc). As a result, the Authority will continue to restrict vehicular access.

Any arguments in support of non-essential vehicle access onto the beach would need to address the primary safety concerns as a priority as well as ensuring that any proposed provision is functionally fit for purpose and capable of being effectively managed and controlled. In the short term addressing these competing considerations is not considered realistic.

### Human Rights/Equality issues

We would direct Members to consider the relevant observations made by the Access Officer and Disability consultant as set out above.

### Biodiversity issues

Whilst we have not carried out any site -specific analysis at Traeth Mawr, studies carried out elsewhere around the globe indicate that removing vehicles from the beach will have a beneficial effect on the environment and its ecology.

Historic issues with overnight parking have led to littering which has an indirect impact on ecology. Our acquisition of the land now provides us with a secure long term platform for our conservation work within dunes. However, expectations must be managed as dune systems are extremely dynamic environments in which the opposing natural forces of accretion and erosion determine the balance.

### Welsh Language considerations

All related communications regarding the Authority's approach at Traeth Mawr have been undertaken in-line with the Authority's Welsh Language Standards.

### Conclusion

The Authority's post purchase actions to date, the resulting response of the general public and the disability access advice which has been received provides little immediate justification to materially revisit the existing resolution of members dated 8/2/23. Instead, it is suggested that the upcoming summer season will be an opportunity to monitor and assess the motoring publics continuing response to the new arrangements on-site.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**That Members instruct Officers to proceed in accordance with their existing resolution dated 8/2/23 and that Members are provided with a further report at a future date setting out the issues, opportunities and challenges that have arisen during the first vehicle free summer on the sands at Traeth Mawr, along with options of how to improve access for people living with disability.**



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## Newport Sands Beach Creation of Accessible Parking Provision.

Date of Report: 19/6/23



### **Introduction.**

The National Diversity Employment Advisory Service Ltd, is owned and operated by Daniel Biddle, who is a registered access consultant, a Fellow of the Royals Society of Arts, An Associate of the Chartered Institute of Building, a Member of the Recruitment and Employment Confederation. He has worked on a multiple of large scale projects such as being the Access Consultant for Bluestone National Parks, The





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football association and lead the accessibility programme for St Georges Park the national training facility for all the England National Football teams, and he is the appointed access consultant for His Royal Highness the Aga Khan. He has over 20 years experience within the construction industry as a projects and construction manager.

### **Background.**

Up until recently a large section the beach at Newport Sands was owned by the golf club, and the club operated a permissive policy of allowing visitors to park on the beach.

The motorists who chose to accept the previous owner's permissive invitation to park on the beach included a proportion of blue badge holders. We also understand that on occasions the invitation to park on the beach included the levying of parking charges by the owner.







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In response to those concerns we have been instructed by the National Park to assess the location and offer suggestions that could potentially continue to provide a degree of beach parking capacity to meet the essential needs of the disabled community. As part of that instruction we undertook a site visit on the 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023.

### ***Observations/Suggestions***

Our experience of disability from both a 'lived' and professional viewpoint is that questions of accessibility that have the potential to impact a wide spectrum of disability's are often best served by following an objective approach. In doing so it is acknowledged that the personal requirements /preferences of each individual are unlikely to be fully addressed. On the specific issue of accessible parking provision, The Blue Badge is a sector leading (albeit imperfect) parking system that has been in operation for many years. It is understood within the disabled community and has a high level of recognition across the wider general public.





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### **A scene of beach parking at Newport sands.**

The National Parks have recently acquired the site, which was previously owned by the golf club, as a management tool to reduce the presence of vehicles on the beach to essential operational vehicles only. Whilst this recently introduced management regime is being observed by the vast majority of the motoring public, it has raised concerns within some sections of the disabled community who regard the beach parking at Newport Sands to be an essential component of their access to this particular location.





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The remainder of this report considers the subject matter having regard to the reasonable needs of the reasonable blue badge holder and is predicated on the assumption the basis that any continuing vehicular access that can be made available for the disabled community should be to accommodate essential need, not discretionary preference .

Balanced against its objective to remove all non-essential vehicle movements from the beach, The National Park must have regard to its legal duty to provide access for those who have the protected characteristic of disability, and a requirement to make reasonable adjustments as per section 20 of the Equality Act 2010. It should also be noted that whilst the previous parking practises took place under the stewardship of the former land owner, the National Park should still give consideration to the impact of its proposed management changes and what if any concessions could be offered to the disabled community without completely undermining or compromising its primary objective of removing the presence of non-essential vehicles from the beach.





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We would suggest the National Parks could achieve that balance by introducing a limited fixed capacity parking provision for Blue Badge holders only within a defined area of the beach via the use of a simple online booking system. That system would not need to include for payment as that provision is already available on site via the respective Pay & Display /Pay by Phone systems, or in advance via the purchase of a season ticket. Instead, the functionality of the system could reasonably be restricted to reserving beach parking (i.e date and duration) to give confidence to the motorist ,supported by the need to input the I.D number of the Blue Badge that would be on display within the vehicle and the registration number of the vehicle to allow the Nat Parks to monitor and address any misuse. It is also recognised that a beach is an unusual parking environment for many motorists and it is suggested that the booking page should alert the motorists to the that they would be entering an unmanaged off road environment, the potential limitations of their own vehicle insurance, the absence of any vehicle recovery service and the dynamic effect of the tide. It is also





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suggested that the prebooking system highlights the limited fixed capacity of the beach parking is to meet essential need and could therefore include a statement asking individuals consider *“Before booking this parking space ask yourself do you really need to park on the beach, if you do not need to please do not book as someone else who may need it can book it.”*

Onsite adaptations which should also be considered are:

- the repositioning of the existing ‘standing wooden piles’ to the immediate proximity of the slipways to prevent motorists from turning left down to the far end of the beach.
- The on (and or) off slipways should remain as a means of accessing any beach parking provision.

Whilst it is outside the core scope of this report, the longevity of any offer that the Nat Parks are able to offer will be influenced by the level of its







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use/misuse. To minimise the risk of misuse compromising potential longevity, we would suggest that the National Parks consider how best to impose effective sanctions on any motorists ( including blue badge holders ) whose vehicle is present upon the beach other than in full compliance with the terms offered. We understand that a system of fixed penalty notices exists covering beach head car parks and can see no reason why this should not be extended to cover the beach for the reasons outlined above.

It is also suggested that the changes outlined above should be supported by a full Equality Impact Assessment and that all relevant existing channels of communication which the Nat Park controls be updated to reflect any new provisions.

The recommendations above are predicated on the assumption that the disabled parking offer would be responsibly used by the disabled community to meet their essential needs and respected by the wider motoring public. However, if the provision were to be materially abused over the coming summer season, we would have no hesitation in

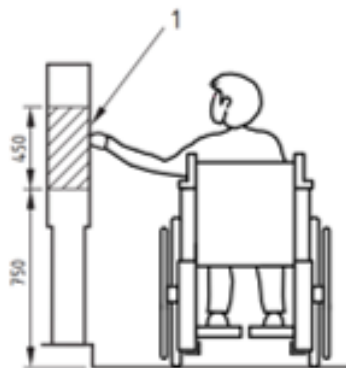




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suggesting that any installed barrier gates be brought in to operation and fitted with an appropriate locking mechanism accessible to motorists holding a pre booked blue badge reservation.

If this requirement becomes necessary, it is imperative that the locking system is installed in such a way as to be accessed from the vehicle.



a) Height of controls and slots above the ground





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## Other Relevant Observations

It was noted that the National Park have existing Blue Badge parking capacity within its car park which immediately overlooks the beach. It also provides seating and viewing facilities adjacent to the Blue Badge spaces which provide elevated views along the beach and out to sea. A connecting pedestrian ramp also leads directly from the accessible blue badge parking down to the beach ( see image below). However, it should be noted that the gradient of that ramp will be problematic for some users to access independently, while the toe of the ramp where it meets the sand is degraded by weather and the tide.





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This is not only a problem relating to access to the beach, but also dangerous and could lead to a person in a wheelchair or who is unstable on their feet taking a fall and sustaining an injury.

It is therefore recommended that repair/alteration work be carried out to the toe of the ramp to continue its gradient to end flush with the sand. We also recommend that this be included into any inspections carried out on the beach to ensure it is always in a fit for purpose condition.

