

# National Park Authority (Ordinary Meeting)

21 June 2023

## Present (In Person)

Councillor D Clements (Chair)

Councillor Steve Alderman, Councillor Dr SL Hancock, Dr R Heath-Davies, Mrs S Hoss, Mrs J James, Councillor M James, Mr GA Jones, Councillor PJ Morgan, Councillor B Price, Dr RM Plummer, Councillor A Wilcox, Councillor M Wiggins and Councillor C Williams BEM.

## Present (Remotely)

Dr M Havard, Councillor R Owens and Councillor S Skyrme-Blackhall.

[Llanion Park, Pembroke Dock and Remotely  
10.30am – 12.10pm; 12.20pm – 1.10pm]

### 1. **Apologies**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R Jordan.

### 2. **Disclosures of Interest**

A general personal disclosure of interest was received from Dr R Plummer in respect of her Membership of the NRW Board and as a Trustee of Plantlife. Dr M Havard and Councillor M Wiggins disclosed a personal interest as Trustees of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Trust which was mentioned in several reports. Councillor B Price disclosed a personal interest in Report 22/23, Report of the Members Task and Finish Group on future provision of season tickets and car parking charges

### 3. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 10 May 2023 were presented for confirmation and signature.

It was **resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2023 be confirmed and signed on the proposal of Councillor D Clements, seconded by Mrs J James.

### 4. **Action Log and Matters arising**

The contents of the Action Log were noted. In addition Members were advised that in respect of action 874 regarding the Sustainable Printing SDF project, setbacks had been experienced due to Covid, planning and the builder undertaking the work, however progress was being made and regular updates were shared with the SDF Committee. It was hoped that the project would be completed by the end of the year.



It was noted that the link to the Cyber Security training (action 838) had been sent to Members, however Dr Plummer suggested that she test this out first to ensure it could be accessed, before all Members undertake the training.

Finally with regard to the Welsh Language Strategy (action 878) it was confirmed that a meeting of the Working Group would take place before the report was presented to the Authority.

**Noted.**

## **5. Chair's Announcements**

The Chair noted that since the last meeting, she had:

- Attended the Welsh Members Seminar which was on the theme of Water. This also incorporated the meeting of the National Parks Wales Executive
- Welcomed an Irish delegation as part of the Ancient Connections project
- Attended the NPUK Chairs Forum

Unfortunately she had been unable to go to the meeting of the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC), however this had been attended by the Chief Executive.

One Member sought an update on the creation of a 4<sup>th</sup> National Park in Wales, and the Chief Executive replied that while there was a political commitment to do this, the process was ongoing but was in the early stages.

**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 Committee held on 19 April 2023;
- (ii) Operational Review Committee held on 15 March 2023;
- (iii) Chief Executive Performance Review Panel held on 22 March 2023;
- (iv) Youth Committees held on 14 March 2023, 28 March 2023 and 9 May 2023.

With regard to the Chief Executive Performance Review Panel, one Member questioned whether the report of this meeting should be made public.



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

## **7. Audit Wales Report on Income Diversification**

Members were reminded that as part of their programme of performance auditing for 2022/23, Audit Wales had undertaken some work which sought to understand whether the Authority had established effective systems to consider, and approve whether and how it should pursue, new opportunities to optimise income. The work had been based on interviews, both internally and externally, and a questionnaire. The report, which was appended to the papers that day, had concluded that the Authority was strengthening its capacity to pursue new income streams but had not agreed principles to determine its level of ambition.

Audit Wales had provided a self-evaluation tool, and recommended that the Authority used this to identify its existing strengths and weaknesses, and develop a strategy for income diversification, as well as setting SMART performance measures and appropriate governance systems to ensure adequate monitoring and scrutiny of delivery of the agreed action plan resulting from its self-evaluation. The Authority had agreed to implement the recommendation.

The Chair welcomed Matthew Brushett and Nick Selwyn to the meeting. Mr Selwyn began by explaining that this work had been undertaken across the three National Parks in Wales, and a summary would be provided to Welsh Government. Mr Brushett added that use of the self-evaluation tool was encouraged to help the Authority identify its appetite for risk in respect of moving into a more commercial space in a more formalised manner.

Members were pleased to see a recognition that not all activities would generate a profit and wished to congratulate officers on the increase in income raised during a difficult economic climate. They noted that the Authority's main income stream currently came from Welsh Government, however that was changing, and with it the balance of powers, and questioned whether there were any sources of funding which were seen as problematic or would require different accounting practices. Mr Selwyn replied that the Authority's remit letter from Welsh Government encouraged Authorities to grow income, recognising that public sector funding was limited. However it was for individual Authorities to determine their own parameters, including ethical considerations and other risks. He would ask his financial audit colleagues to consider whether different systems were required in respect of new activity.

Members also considered that the self-evaluation checklist would prove helpful, and suggested that this could be discussed at a workshop. The



Chief Executive agreed that this would be arranged, prior to the matter being discussed at a future meeting of the Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee and ultimately by the Authority. They also questioned the appropriateness of creating a commercial arm given an apparent lack of fundraising experience amongst Members. The Chief Executive replied that the Authority was already part of the National Parks Partnership which fulfilled that national fundraising role.

Two final points were made, that the language in the Welsh report was more direct than the English in terms of the need for the Authority to diversify its income. Also a question was asked regarding the cost of the Audit. The Chief Executive added that audit costs had been raised with the Financial Auditor at the Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee as the fee had increased, yet there was a delay in the accounts being audited. Mr Selwyn agreed to raise the first point with his colleagues.

**Noted.**

#### **8. Draft Corporate and Resources Plan and Delivery Plans 2023/24-2025/27**

It was reported that the Authority's draft Corporate and Resources Plan 2023/24 -26/27 set out, in line with requirements under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the Authority's Well-being Objectives and Statement; the steps that would be taken to reach these Objectives through its placemaking activities and delivery plans; and how it would meet the sustainable development principles within the Act. The plan also took into account the Welsh Government term of government remit letter and wider policy context.

To turn the Authority's ambitions into operational action a set of Delivery Plans for 2023/24-26/27 had been developed. These plans were cross cutting in nature, with activities often supporting one or more of the Well-being Objectives. Responsibility for delivery of a plan sat with a member of the Authority's Management Team who would work with officers across the Authority to ensure the plan was delivered via a collaborative approach.

It was noted at the meeting that an error had been identified in the finance table and in some of the external links contained within the draft Corporate and Resources Plan. These would be corrected in the final version of the Plan. Following consultation with staff, the plans would be presented to the July meeting of the Authority for approval, although they would continue to evolve.

The Authority's Heads of Department then made a brief presentation on the main plans relating to: Nature Recovery; Decarbonisation; Adapting to



Climate Change; Health, Wellbeing and Access; Supporting Regenerative Tourism through the Visitor Economy; Pembrokeshire Life and Resources and Broadening our funding, highlighting the main actions contained within them and how success would be measured. It was noted that the remaining Plans which related to Governance and Decision Making; Skills Development and Training; Communications and Digital Transformation, would support the new approach.

Members congratulated officers, and particularly the Performance and Compliance Coordinator, for their hard work in producing the plans and were pleased to note their cross-cutting nature and the way they aligned with the Authority's priorities. They were also pleased to hear that there had been good internal communication as engagement with the plans by all staff was important. Members asked that something be added to the plans on evaluation and monitoring, particularly in respect of SMART measures with an annual focus. The Chief Executive replied that both the Authority's Management Team and its two Review Committee would be important in monitoring and wording to reflect this would be included in the final version of the Plans.

**Noted.**

[The Meeting was adjourned between 12.10pm and 12.20pm]

**9. Annual Governance Statement 2022/23**

Members were reminded that the Authority was required to produce an Annual Governance Statement (AGS). During the current year the Authority had revised its Code of Corporate Governance and therefore the statement had been revised to reflect this change.

The draft statement had been reviewed by the Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee in March 2023 but Members were further invited to contribute to and shape the contents of the document before it was agreed by the Authority as an Annex to the Annual Accounts. Until then, it remained a work in progress with additional information still to be provided.

At the meeting, the Finance Manager apologised that the diagrams on the second page of the document had not printed and that there was a typographical error in the heading at the bottom of page 8. He added that the Review of Effectiveness on page 10 and following was based on the seven principles of the CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) Code of Corporate Governance.

Members asked that the wording in respect of Health and Safety at the top of page 172 be reviewed to reflect that the Authority had been in



receipt of an Improvement Notice. They also suggested that the document would benefit from a stylistic review to shorten it as they felt that there was a danger that the key messages were at risk of being lost as a result of its thoroughness. Officers advised that careful consideration would need to be given to ensure that the document retained its essential purpose, however it was agreed that examples of other Statements could be looked in preparing next year's AGS.

**Noted.**

[Councillor B Price declared a personal interest in the following item]

**10. Car Parking Provision of Season Tickets and Charging**

Members were reminded that at the meeting of the Authority in December 2022, it had been resolved that a Task and Finish Group be established to consider the future provision of season tickets and car park charges across the Authority's car parks. The group had since met three times, considering the role car parks played in the National Park and the price of parking.

The report presented a policy statement in respect of the Authority's management of its car parks which had been agreed by the Task and Finish Group, and also a recommendation that the Authority benchmark its hourly parking rate for the coming year against Pembrokeshire County Council's (PCC) coastal car parks with the resultant increases set out in the report. It was also recommended that car park charges be reviewed annually, with a 3 yearly review of the pricing structure.

Members agreed that it seemed sensible to have a common tariff in respect of coastal car parks around the county but questioned whether the implications of raising prices on accessibility to the National Park had been considered and what the rationale behind increasing prices was, if it wasn't to recover costs. Officers replied that an equality impact assessment had been undertaken in respect of the recently introduced changes to season ticket prices and a similar exercise would be undertaken as part of any revision to the Authority's Car Park Order. They acknowledged that the car parks did generate a surplus, however prices had not risen for a number of years and the Authority was being encouraged to consider different methods of funding (as discussed earlier in the meeting, Minute 7 refers). Nevertheless, it was a difficult balance, although other offerings such as the free 30 minute spaces and season tickets existed, and the principle of no charging in the evenings and out of season had been maintained.

In respect of the policy statement, it was noted that there was no reference in it to benchmarking with PCC, and no statement regarding



season tickets. Members of the Group clarified that the suggestion was not one of permanent parity with PCC prices, but a recommendation for this year only. It was also noted that the recommendation was to review the pricing structure, which included season tickets, every 3 years. A report on Season Tickets had been considered by the Authority in December 2022 and it was not proposed to change these in the forthcoming year, however this would be looked at again in future.

On the proposal of Mrs J James, seconded by Dr R Plummer, it was **resolved** that:

- a) the policy statement in respect of the Authority's management of its car parks as set out in the report be agreed;
- b) Pay and Display car parking charges be increased, as set out in the report, to align with Pembrokeshire County Council's coastal car parking charges for the 2024/25 season;
- c) the process of amending the Authority's current Car Park Order be commenced; and
- d) an annual review of car park charges and a 3 yearly review of pricing structure be agreed.

#### **11. Update on Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS)**

Members were reminded that following a visit by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in December 2022, an Improvement Notice had been received by the Authority. This had therefore been an area of significant focus for many staff and an action plan had been developed. This had been submitted to HSE and they had confirmed that the Park Authority had fully complied with the Improvement Notice and that its management approach meant that the Authority was meeting its duties under the Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005.

It was reported that the changes had impacted ways of working, with measures put in place to assess both equipment and staff which would ensure that individual daily HAV exposure limits were not exceeded. New equipment had been purchased, including remote-controlled technology and there had been significant training for all relevant staff.

A report on HAVS would be presented to the next meeting of the Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee and, although progress continued to be monitored, it was noted that an in-depth review would be undertaken at the end of the cutting season to consider the effectiveness of the current approach.

Members commended officers for their speed of action and progress made. They hoped that the lessons learned could be shared with other organisations, and officer replied that they were happy to do so.



**Noted.**

## **12. Update on Newport Sands**

Members were reminded that further to the decision taken by the Authority at its meeting in February 2023, the purchase of Newport Sands beach had been completed and signs erected, advising that vehicular access to the beach would be limited to emergency services and those requiring essential access. There had been much positive feedback and a high degree of compliance with the new arrangements. Unsurprisingly, there had also been some negative comments, particularly in respect of accessibility for those with disabilities. Advice on this issue had been taken from Pembrokeshire County Council's Access Officer and a report had been commissioned from a specialist consultant. A further report would therefore be made to a future meeting of the Authority and officers would continue to monitor the situation.

In response to a question from a Member, it was confirmed that implementation of the communications plan was ongoing and officers were also looking at additional interpretation in the car park. A request had also been made by Nevern Community Council that the site be referred to as 'Traeth Mawr' and the sign had been changed to reflect this.

**Noted.**

