

# National Park Authority

26 July 2023

## Present (In Person)

Councillor Mrs D Clements (Chair)

Mrs J James, Mr GA Jones and Councillor PJ Morgan.

## Present (Remotely)

Councillor S Alderman, Councillor SL Hancock, Dr M Havard, Dr R Heath-Davies, Mrs S Hoss, Councillor M James, Councillor R Jordan, Councillor B Price, Councillor S Skyrme-Blackhall, Councillor A Wilcox and Councillor C Williams BEM.

[Llanion Park, Pembroke Dock and Remotely 10.00am –  
11.21am; 11.32am – 12.09pm]

### 1. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor R Owens, Dr RM Plummer and Councillor M Wiggins.

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

No disclosures of interest were received.

### 3. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings held on the 21 June 2023 (AGM and ordinary meeting) were presented for confirmation and signature.

It was **RESOLVED** on the proposal of Councillor P Morgan, Seconded by Dr M Havard, that the minutes of the meetings held on the 21 June 2023 (AGM and ordinary) be confirmed and signed.

### 4. **Action Log**

The contents of the Action Log were noted. The Chair added that in relation to item 886, a decision had been reached not to bring minutes of the Chief Executive Performance Review Panel to future National Park Authority meetings however Members could view these on request.

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

The Chair reported that she had attended the following events:

- The opening of the Lost Words Exhibition at Oriel y Parc, St Davids. The Chair expressed her thanks to the team for a great event.
- The Royal Welsh Show where she visited the Farming Unions, met the First Minister and the Minister for Climate Change and discussed matters such as the Sustainable Farming Scheme and Sustainable Tourism.



- The Natural Resources Wales ‘Nature and Us’ presentation which presented the National initiative on the future of the Welsh natural environment.

**Noted.**

**6. Reports of meetings of various Authority Committees**

The following reports of meetings of several of the Authority’s Committees were presented to Members for consideration/information:

- (i) Development Management Committees held on 7 and 21 June 2023;
- (ii) Audit & Corporate Services Review Committee held on 17 May 2023;
- (iii) Youth Committee held on 6 July 2023;

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

**7. Draft Strategy for Internal Audit 2023/24 – 2025/26**

The Chair welcomed Ceri Kwiecinski, Risk Assurance Manager for the Authority’s new Internal auditors, Astari, who presented the Draft Strategy for Internal Audit 2023/24 – 2025/26.

It was reported that the document featured a detailed Audit Plan for the upcoming year which had been developed following a review of key documents, a review of other assurances provided to the Authority and consultation with the Management Team. It was confirmed that the draft strategy had been considered by the Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee on the 12 July 2023 and the report was subsequently updated following the discussions held at that meeting. Ceri highlighted that as Astari was new to the Authority, the plan was a dynamic document and risk-based, therefore subject to change.

It was noted that the Pay & Grading review was not featured in the plan as an area to be reviewed and one Member asked whether this could be audited once the review had taken place. The Chief Executive agreed that a review of this area in the future would be appropriate though this would not necessarily be undertaken by internal audit.

One Member requested reassurance that there would be a level of synergy between the External Auditor, Audit Wales and the Internal Auditor, Astari. Ceri responded that Astari always aimed to have a close relationship with an organisations External Auditor and provided the Members with past examples of actions taken to ensure this collaboration. Ceri added that it was hoped that both Audit Wales and Astari would attend the same Audit Committee meeting on at least one occasion to encourage a partnership approach.



One Member praised Astari for their willingness to be flexible and asked if they would have the scope to add another area to the plan if a matter were to rise unexpectedly. Ceri responded that should this be required, Astari would be able to look at other, less prioritised areas that could be rescheduled for the beginning of the next financial year or otherwise, the Authority could purchase additional days at the standard rate for additional areas to be covered.

On the proposal of Councillor S Hancock, Seconded by Dr M Havard, it was **RESOLVED** that the Draft Strategy for Internal Audit 2023/24 – 2025/26 be agreed.

#### 8. **Oriel y Parc Masterplan**

The Chair welcomed James Parkin (Director of Nature Recovery & Tourism), Clare Bates (Head of Regenerative Tourism) and Nicola Ward (Creative Core Consultant), who presented the Oriel y Parc (OYP) Masterplan which detailed the refreshed focus of the site as a true Discovery Centre for the wider National Park.

Members were provided with background of the Centre, and it was confirmed that the Authority had invested £3.5 million in the gallery which was opened in 2008. It was reported that despite the successful launch of the Centre, the original business plan resulted in financial challenges. In the bid to address these challenges, the staff structure was consolidated, the retail offer on site was improved and the café operation was outsourced. It was recognised that although these changes had been successful, they had impacted the space and staff available to deliver interpretation activities and events. The negative impact of Covid-19 on the Visitor Centre was also highlighted as the site had to close for a significant length of time.

It was explained that following several workshops, the team concluded that many of the operational decisions made over the years for the Centre had been income generation focused and so the Masterplan was subsequently developed in a bid to refresh the centre's focus on conservation, creativity and commerciality in equal measure. It was added that through implementing the Masterplan, the Centre would be used to its fullest potential in addressing issues such as climate change, the biodiversity crisis and income generation.

A Member noted that the report detailed a potential opportunity to negotiate a charge increase with the current operator of the café and asked whether this increase would be sustainable for the current provider or were there plans to retender the opportunity to the open market as part of the Masterplan. The Estates Officer confirmed that the current café



lease ran until November 2024 and that discussions were taking place regarding whether it was best to revert to the open market at the end of each lease cycle in future or if efforts should be made to continue to work with the existing provider as this presented less of a risk to the Authority.

Visitor numbers were reported as part of the Masterplan and one Member was disheartened to note that although there had been approximately 96,000 individuals visit OYP, only 13,087 individuals had visited the gallery, despite it being free to enter. It was asked whether feedback was collected on site to understand these statistics further. The Head of Regenerative Tourism responded that these statistics, in her opinion, highlighted the need for the Centre to be an attraction in its own right as a National Park Discovery Centre rather than relying on the gallery to attract visitors. The Officer explained that the majority of individuals visited Oriel y Parc to plan their activities in Pembrokeshire and subsequently stumbled across the gallery therefore it was an important element of the Centre but not the most important. It was added that feedback was collected from visitors which was generally overwhelmingly positive.

One Member asked about the relationship with Amgueddfa Cymru (National Museum Wales) which had once been vibrant and collaborative and the Chief Executive replied that the organisation had gone through a period of change, however he confirmed that the memorandum of understanding was due for review in 2024 and the Authority had the aim of engaging at a higher level to reestablish that strong relationship. Members expressed approval of this renewed approach as they considered this National link to be crucial for the local community. In response to a question raised by a Member, it was confirmed that OYP had a strong connection with the local community and engaged frequently through a range of activities and events.

Members commended the team for the exciting and ambitious plan, but concern was expressed regarding the funding required and it was suggested that a cost benefit model be conducted. It was acknowledged that despite this, the plan presented some 'quick wins' that could be implemented in the short term with little cost. The Chief Executive explained that the Masterplan was designed with ambition in mind as the Authority wanted to be in a position to apply for funding that was awarded to more significant schemes. The Chief Executive reminded Members that the Masterplan was a collection of ideas that would be subject to a host of Business Development processes before being implemented therefore the figures and wording featured within the Masterplan were not definitive at this stage. It was added that any developments would be brought back to future meetings to ensure that Members were a part of the journey.



On the proposal of Dr M Havard, Seconded by Dr R Heath Davies, it was **RESOLVED** that 'Option 3' in the Oriell y Parc Masterplan be approved as the long-term aspiration for Oriell y Parc subject to the development of a business plan and the securing of necessary funding.

**9. Draft Corporate & Resources Plan and Delivery Plans 2023/24 – 2026/27**

The Chair welcomed Mair Thomas, the Performance and Compliance Officer, who presented the Corporate and Resources Plan and Delivery Plans 2023/24-2026/27. These documents had been circulated to staff and presented in draft form to Members at the previous meeting of the Authority and the report highlighted the key themes raised and how these had been addressed. An Integrated Assessment summary for the Corporate and Resources Plan was also appended to the report.

A discussion ensued regarding the substantial size of the Delivery Plan and concerns were raised regarding how Members would review the priority areas. A suggestion was made that each of the 4 main priority areas could be reviewed at the Operational Review Committee, one priority area per meeting. One Member confirmed that the Audit & Corporate Services Review Committee also review these plans in depth and would benefit from clarification as to which areas require most attention and scrutiny. The Chief Executive agreed with these points and suggested that the Chairs of the Audit and Operational Committees both meet with the Performance and Compliance Officer to discuss Member accountability and oversight in relation to these plans. All were in agreement.

On the proposal of Mrs J James, Seconded by Councillor S Alderman, it was **RESOLVED** that the Corporate and Resources Plan and Delivery Plans 2023/24 – 2026/27 be approved.

[The meeting was adjourned between 11:21am and 11:32am]

**10. Welsh Government Infrastructure (Wales) Bill**

The Chair welcomed Sara Morris, the Director of Placemaking, Decarbonisation and Engagement, who presented an update on the development of the Welsh Government Infrastructure (Wales) Bill and outlined the key points the Authority wished to make to a consultation on this emerging legislation. Members were invited to add additional comments to include in the response. The report detailed the proposed changes to the legislative framework and detailed considerations of the proposals.



It was reported that the Bill had been referred to the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee at the Senedd for Stage 1 scrutiny of the general principles of the Bill. It was added that the Committee was seeking views on the general principles of the Bill and the need for legislation to deliver the stated policy intention. The closing date for submissions was noted as Friday 11 August 2023.

It was reported that under the current system, Local Public Authorities (LPA) receive only 20% of fee income from Development of National Significance (DNS) applications, despite the significant workload associated with these. It was explained that the Authority had previously been required to contribute to a neighbouring LPAs DNS Local Impact Report but received no fee payment for this under the present system. It was hoped that the development of new regulations to accompany the Infrastructure (Wales) Bill would allow this key issue to be considered. It was highlighted by Members that offshore applications could have an impact on the workload of the Authority and queries were raised as to whether distinctions would be made as to which LPA would be responsible for each area. Additionally, a Member queried whether consents such as Environmental Impact Assessment and Marine Conservation Zone Assessments would remain in light of these changes. The Members comments and queries were noted to be included in the consultation response.

On the proposal of Councillor S Alderman, Seconded by Councillor M James, it was **RESOLVED**;

- (a) That the emerging response to the consultation on Infrastructure (Wales) Bill be endorsed.
- (b) That Members would provide any further comments to be featured in the Authority's final response by the close of business on the 9th of August 2023.
- (c) That the National Park Authority's Director of Placemaking, Decarbonisation and Engagement would be given delegated powers to submit a response to Welsh Government Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee subject to agreement by the Chair of the Authority.

#### **11. Update of Use of Land at Traeth Mawr / Newport Sands for the Purpose of Stopping the Practice of Beach Parking**

The Chair welcomed Gary Meopham, Estates Officer, who presented an update to Members on Traeth Mawr (Newport Sands Beach) following the acquisition of the subject land on the 9 May 2023.



The Estates Officer began by showing Members images of Traeth Mawr in the Summers of 2022 and 2023 to show the impact of the recent changes to vehicular access to the beach. It was confirmed that the barrier that stopped vehicles from accessing the beach had been in place for just over a week.

Members acknowledged that the matter of disabled access to the beach following the changes at Traeth Mawr had been raised. The Estates Officer confirmed that all National Park Authority car parks offered disabled car parking spaces for those with Blue Badges however this scheme was managed and monitored by the Pembrokeshire County Council.

One Member expressed their sympathy for individuals with a disability who had historically been able to access the beach with the use of a vehicle and asked whether it was possible for the Authority to strike a balance for individuals who relied on this disabled access. Another Member added that the Authority needed to consider more creative ways to support communities in accessing the National Park and to understand that people had a range of challenges. The example of access volunteers who could support individuals in accessing the beach was suggested.

The provision of beach wheelchairs at Traeth Mawr was noted as being an important addition in the bid to improve access to the beach and it was confirmed that the aim was to expand this provision further in the future.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the Authority needed to strike a balance between safety and risk whilst working to widen access as much as possible for all to enjoy the beach. Officers had concluded that at present, there was no safe way to allow cars on to the beach and therefore, it was suggested that the barrier should remain in place for the remainder of the year while other avenues were explored. It was reiterated that the safety of the public and the protection of the environment were the Authority's top priorities in this matter.

On the proposal of Dr M Havard, seconded by Mrs J James, it was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) officers proceed in accordance with their existing resolution dated 08/02/23 and that Members would be provided with a further report at a future date setting out the issues, opportunities and challenges that arose during the first vehicle free summer on the sands at Traeth Mawr;
- b) options of how to improve access to the beach for people living with disability be actively pursued.

