

Report of Director of Placemaking, Decarbonisation and Engagement

Subject: PCNPA facilities voluntary payment to PCC regarding public toilets – update on joint working

Purpose of Report

This report provides an update to Members on progress with joint working with Pembrokeshire County Council on toilet facilities. This follows previous agreement from the Authority to make a voluntary contribution to support the provision of public toilets in the National Park area over a 2-year period commencing in April 2024.

Introduction/Background

Wider discussions between PCC and the National Park Authority regarding the provision of public toilets have been taking place since 2022.

In February 2023 the National Park Authority received a letter from the Chief Executive of Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC) regarding toilet facilities in Pembrokeshire. This letter set out the results of a PCC Cabinet decision in February and identified that if the National Park Authority was unable to financially contribute towards the provision of a number of toilet facilities around the coast, that PCC would close those facilities from the 5th November 2023.

Following receipt of this letter, a Members' Working Group was established by the Authority which considered this request in 2023. In September 2023 the National Park Authority considered the feedback from the Working Group and agreed the following:

1. To approve a formal offer to Pembrokeshire County Council to fund toilet facilities at specific locations within the National Park for a period of two years.
2. To agree that this offer be subject to a request for a commitment from Pembrokeshire County Council that it establish a working group consisting of representatives of the National Park, along with other relevant partners to develop a strategy to seek grant funding to improve general standards at locations around the coast and to develop an Accessible Coast project, submitting grant funded applications over this two year period.

The locations supported for funding were identified following consideration of a range of datasets. This included consideration of geographical data looking at the proximity of facilities to important environmental designations (for example Sites of Scientific Interest or Special Areas of Conservation).

It also included consideration of the contribution facilities play in relation to key areas of work for the National Park Authority such as use by its Education team for outdoor engagement and whether or not there were connections to emerging projects such as the National Park Authority's beach wheelchair schemes. Other factors such as impact on Blue Flag status were also detailed. Such criteria, as well as an understanding of levels of current public use and other information supplied by PCC's officers were used to generate a scoring system which identified which individual facilities contributed most significantly in terms of National Park purposes.

The locations that the National Park agreed to fund for a period of two years were:

West Angle
Freshwater East
Manorbier
Newport Sands / Traeth Mawr
Poppit Sands
Saundersfoot
Broad Haven North
Solva
St Brides Bay
Little Haven

Update on Progress

Regular meetings have been established between key officers of the Authority and Pembrokeshire County Council meeting every 2-3 months on this issue.

The main area of work to date has been on sharing evidence on sites and identifying what additional baseline information may be required.

The following specific projects are the current focus of Officer work:

- A specific project at Traeth Mawr / Newport Sands which was approved in principle by the National Park Authority in its March 20th meeting. This project includes the wider development of Traeth Mawr / Newport Sands as an Accessible location using capital grant funding to provide new toilets and a changing places facility alongside a new accessible ramp to the beach, car parking and wheelchair provision as well as environmental and biodiversity improvements. A drainage study will potentially identify options for improved foul water disposal/treatment which it is anticipated will reduce the running costs of the facility. As part of this scheme PCC officers have helped with the design and specification of a new toilet block and inputted into consideration of options including using solar pv on the roof and including charging for their use.
- PCNPA officers have tendered on Sell 2 Wales for a Coastal Car Park Study using grant funding available to the National Park. This study seeks to identify how pay and display car park locations can provide accessible gateways to the National Park. This study will identify opportunities to enhance inclusivity and accessibility including analysis of potential delivery of improved toilet facilities' and changing places. It is anticipated that the outcomes of this study will provide a clear evidence base to support further grant funding applications for other sites in the National Park.

Next Steps

The intention is to focus over the next 6 months on the delivery of Traeth Mawr / Newport Sands as a pilot project and learn lessons from this scheme if appropriate. Alongside this the evidence gathered through the Coastal Car Park Study will inform the identification of other project sites. This will be used to inform future grant funding bids including to the next round of Brilliant Basics funding.

Financial considerations

As set out in the report to September 2023, the Authority will provide financial support on a voluntary contribution basis to Pembrokeshire County Council of £110k per year for a 2-year period. This is included within existing agreed budgets.

Risk considerations

In making the decision in its September 2023 meeting the Authority considered risks to the National Park of not funding toilets. These risks included environmental risks to key sites across the National Park linked to toilet closures, risks to individuals and groups (including those with protected characteristics of a loss of facilities) and risks to the status of individual locations relating to reputation through loss of Blue Flag status.

There is a risk to the Authority that there may be ongoing public expectation of continued financial support for public toilets beyond the agreed 2-year period that the Authority may struggle to meet financially, depending on future budgets. The work of Officers in identifying how capital investment can reduce ongoing revenue costs following investment in key locations is anticipated to reduce this risk to the Authority going forward.

Equality considerations

The Public Equality Duty requires the Authority to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different communities. This means that, in the formative stages of our policies, procedure, practice or guidelines, the Authority needs to take into account what impact its decisions will have on people who are protected under the Equality Act 2010 (people who share a protected characteristic of age, sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, and religion or belief).

Whilst PCNPA has no legal duty to provide toilet facilities, provision of payment towards maintaining these facilities is likely to support PCC in reducing the impacts on groups with protected characteristics that would otherwise be negatively impacted by their closure.

Compliance

No compliance issues are anticipated from this project.

Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal

Environmental risks associated with toilet closures were identified in the background papers informing the September 2023 decision.

The current work including the Traeth Mawr/ Newport Sands project and evidence base gathering is seeking to ensure that improvements to drainage and wider site deliver a more sustainable and environmentally friendly solution alongside reduced revenue costs.

Welsh Language considerations

No Welsh language impacts are identified as a result of this work.

Recommendations:

Members:

- (i) Note the progress on work in this area.**

Background Documents

September 2023 National Park Authority report and minutes

March 2024 National Park Authority report on Traeth Mawr / Newport Sands and minutes

Author: Sara Morris

Consulted/engaged with (internal and/or external stakeholders): Jessica Morgan, Andrew Muskett, Gary Meopham