

Report of: Director of Nature and Tourism

Subject: Heritage Lottery Fund Bid – Pembrokeshire Landscape Connections Project

Decision Required: Yes

Recommendation:

To agree £135K of match funding, alongside associated staff time, to support the Development Phase of the joint 'Pembrokeshire Landscape Connections' application by Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA) and National Trust Cymru (NTC) to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

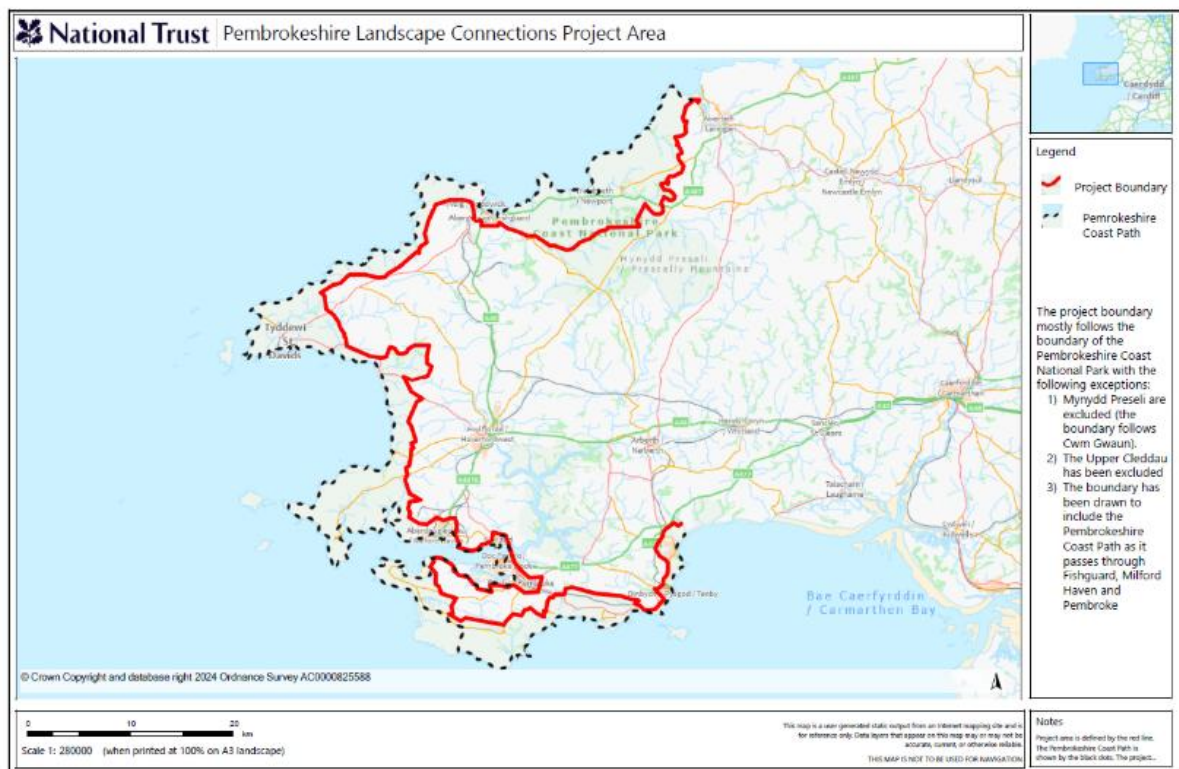
1. Key Messages

- The climate and nature emergencies require an accelerated and more deeply focussed approach to support improved outcomes for nature, landowners and communities in Pembrokeshire.
- By combining efforts across both PCNPA and NTC we hope to drive long-term landscape-scale nature recovery across the coastal landscapes of Pembrokeshire.
- By applying to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) we hope to secure a £12.9m investment over a 10-year period to support our collective conservation ambitions for the National Park.

2. Summary / Vision

Pembrokeshire Landscape Connections is a strategic partnership project led by National Trust Cymru and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority, designed to drive long-term landscape-scale nature recovery across the coastal landscapes of Pembrokeshire. Through nature-friendly land management, stronger ecological networks and deeper connections between people, land, food, heritage and nature, the project will help deliver Wales's 30x30 ambition while creating a lasting movement for nature across the National Park and beyond.

The project focuses on a defined coastal landscape of approximately 39,000 hectares (Figure 1) where the pressures of climate change, agricultural improvements, biodiversity loss and social inequality intersect most acutely.



(Figure 1: Approximate Project Area – land to the coastal side of the red line)

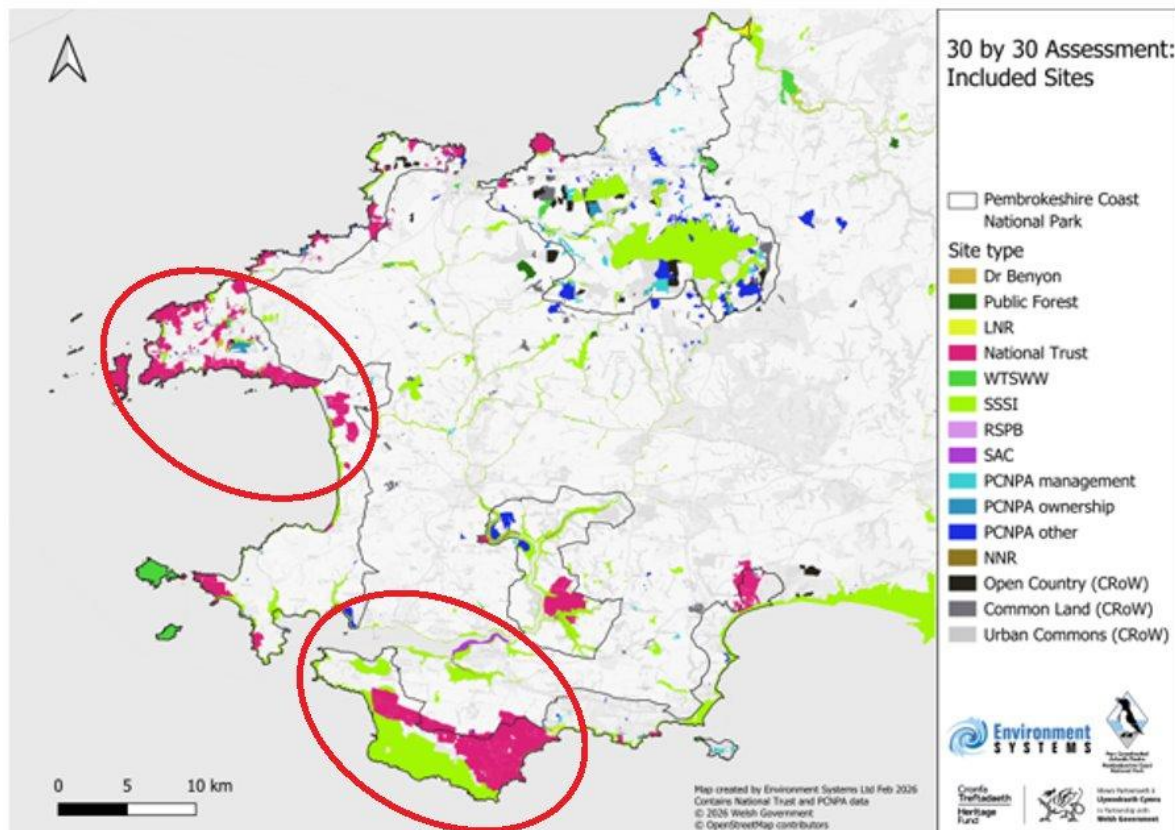
Despite sustained effort, these pressures persist because they are systemic and interconnected. Environmental decline is influenced by the way land is managed; farming businesses face economic and policy uncertainty; and many communities - particularly those experiencing disadvantage - remain disconnected from nature, skills and opportunity.

Fragmented, site-based interventions have not been sufficient to address these interconnected issues at scale.

Pembrokeeshire Landscape Connections will respond to these challenges by working with farmers, landowners, communities and partner organisations as co-creators, to build trust, share learning, test innovation and deliver collective action at a landscape scale.

Landscape Connections will support delivery of the Welsh Government's 30x30 commitment by acting as a catalyst for collective action and landscape-scale nature recovery, guided by the 'Lawton principle' of creating "More, Bigger, Better and Joined" habitats. Working alongside initiatives including NRW's Resilient Ecological Networks (RENs), the Protected Sites Programme, Naturfa and the emerging Super National Nature Reserve approach, it will help align investment, knowledge and action across landowners, businesses, local authorities, charities, farmers and communities. Together, these programmes will strengthen connected and resilient ecological networks, support effective management of protected areas, and demonstrate large-scale partnership approaches to restoring nature across Wales.

St Davids and Castlemartin have been selected as the project's initial focus areas (figure 2) because they contain extensive networks of protected sites, significant opportunities for landscape-scale nature recovery, and a strong foundation of existing partnerships. During the Development Phase of the project, these clusters will act as demonstrator areas, allowing Landscape Connections to test approaches, build evidence, strengthen partnerships and develop delivery models that can be refined and applied across the wider project area.



(Figure 2: Initial 30x30 opportunity clusters identified through PCNPA's Nature Networks Fund 4 scoping work, with St Davids and Castlemartin selected as Landscape Connections' initial focus areas for landscape-scale nature recovery.

The project is structured around three integrated themes:

1. Restoring nature at landscape scale by connecting habitats, restoring natural processes, and coordinating landowners and conservation partners to create more resilient landscapes for wildlife and people.
2. Reconnecting people to nature, land and heritage; and
3. Embedding cultural heritage, local knowledge and community identity within landscape recovery.

These themes are underpinned by a cross-cutting focus on systems change through stronger partnerships, improved policy and practice, new investment mechanisms, and increased capacity for long-term landscape recovery.

The project will be delivered over ten years, commencing with a two-year Development Phase to build evidence, strengthen partnerships, test approaches and develop delivery-ready proposals for the subsequent eight-year Delivery Phase.

By the end of the project, Pembrokeshire Landscape Connections will:

1. Increase the extent, connectivity and long-term management of land for nature recovery and climate resilience, supporting delivery of Wales's 30by30 ambition.
2. Support a locally led transition towards nature-friendly farming and land management.
3. Improve wellbeing, skills, employability and connection to nature through participation in landscape recovery.
4. Embed cultural heritage and local identity within landscape recovery.
5. Establish enduring partnerships, networks and learning that support long-term landscape recovery and wider policy ambitions.

Pembrokeshire Landscape Connections represents a significant opportunity to deliver coordinated, lasting change across one of Wales's most iconic coastal landscapes while creating a model that can inform future landscape-scale partnerships elsewhere.

Background – HLF Landscape Connections Fund

The HLF 'Landscape Connections Fund' is designed to help Protected Landscapes and other world-class landscapes across the UK to become better for nature and people.

HLF are investing £150million across approximately 20 long-term projects in:

- National Parks and National Landscapes in England and Wales
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Northern Ireland
- National Parks and other equally important world-class landscapes in Scotland

The aim is to support those who care for these places to strengthen them as working landscapes, which are alive with nature and provide space for people to relax and connect with the environment. HLF are keen to support whole landscapes to bring about significant and enduring improvement.

The application and delivery process is organised around a number of distinct phases as detailed below.

Project Delivery Phasing and Objectives

The next application window for HLF funding is in November 2026. If successful, the development and delivery of the 'Pembrokeshire Landscape Connections' project will progress as follows:

Development Phase Objectives (June 2027 – May 2029)

The Development Phase will focus on risk management, establishing the evidence base, fostering inclusive partnerships as well as testing new approaches and delivery mechanisms required to support a successful Delivery Phase (see below).

Objective 1: Evidence and Insight

Establish a robust evidence base and stakeholder understanding to inform prioritisation and delivery across the project area.

1. Analyse farming systems, landownership, motivations, constraints and opportunities
2. Identify priority habitats, ecological networks and restoration opportunities.
3. Undertake community mapping, audience research and engagement design across the project area, with pilot delivery focused on target communities within and around the St Davids and Castlemartin clusters.
4. Validate findings with farmers, landowners, communities and stakeholders.

Objective 2: Testing and Designing Future Delivery

Develop and test locally relevant approaches to nature recovery, land management and community engagement, including:

1. Identify demonstration farms, case studies and pilot projects.
2. Develop nature-friendly farming interventions and transition pathways.
3. Pilot place-based volunteering, learning and skills programmes.
4. Establish monitoring, evaluation and learning frameworks.
5. Design advisory, grant and financial support mechanisms aligned with local needs.

Objective 3: Delivery Readiness

Develop delivery-ready plans and governance arrangements to support implementation of the Delivery Phase, including:

1. Baseline ecological, heritage and socio-economic data for all project cluster areas
2. Agreed land management and restoration plans.

Objective 4: Partnership and Systems Change

Establish the partnerships, governance and delivery models needed to support long-term landscape recovery.

1. Establish enduring partnerships and community networks that continue beyond the life of the project.
2. Strengthen relationships between landowners, communities and partners.
3. Align delivery with wider initiatives including 30x30, Naturfa, and Super NNRs
4. Produce a framework for scaling successful approaches during Delivery.

Delivery Phase Objectives (December 2029 – January 2038)

Objective 1: Landscape-Scale Nature Recovery

Deliver measurable improvements in habitat quality, connectivity and climate resilience across the project area through coordinated action by farmers, landowners, communities and partner organisations.

1. Restore, enhance and manage priority habitats and ecological networks.
2. Improve habitat condition, species recovery and climate resilience.
3. Strengthen connectivity between protected sites, working landscapes and coastal habitats.

Objective 2: Nature-Friendly Farming and Land Management

Support farmers and land managers to adopt practices that contribute to nature recovery, climate resilience and sustainable land management across the project area.

1. Increase adoption of nature-friendly farming practices.
2. Support demonstration farms, innovation and peer-to-peer learning.
3. Establish and sustain farm clusters that enable collective action and landscape-scale delivery.
4. Improve access to trusted advice, support and funding opportunities.

Objective 3: People, Skills and Participation

Improve access to nature, skills, volunteering and employment opportunities through active participation in landscape recovery.

1. Deliver targeted volunteering, engagement and learning programmes.
2. Support people from priority communities to participate in nature recovery activities.
3. Create pathways into training, employment and environmental stewardship.
4. Improve wellbeing, confidence and connection to nature.

Objective 4: Cultural Heritage

Embed cultural heritage, local knowledge and community identity within landscape recovery, strengthening people's connection to place and informing future land management.

1. Integrate cultural heritage evidence into landscape recovery planning.
2. Engage communities in recording, celebrating and interpreting heritage assets.
3. Demonstrate how heritage can support sustainable land management and nature recovery.

Objective 5: Legacy and Systems Change

Create lasting environmental, social and organisational change that continues beyond the lifetime of the project.

1. Establish enduring partnerships and community networks that continue beyond the lifetime of the project.
2. Empower communities to challenge current assumptions about agricultural production vs environmental protection.
3. Build a movement for nature across the National Park, inspiring and enabling landowners, businesses and communities to play an active role in nature recovery.
4. Contribute to wider ambitions including Naturfa, 30x30 and landscape-scale approaches such as Super NNR
5. Generate evidence, case studies and learning that inform future policy, funding and practice.

Project Timetable

Activity/milestone	Date
Client Brief approved	26.10.2025
Draft proposal circulated	July 2026
NT approval (Wales)	August 2026
PCNPA Members approve	23.09.2026
NT approval (UK)	30.09.2026
Working on Development Phase application	Throughout 2026
Partnership Agreement signed by NTC and PCNPA (delegated to PCNPA CEO)	October 2026
HLF Round 1 submissions date	12 Nov 2026
HLF decision on Development Phase application	March 2027
HLF Permission to Start	June 2027
Development Phase (recruited roles start Sept-27)	June 2027 – May 2029
Interim period (between HLF grants)	June 2029 – November 2029
Delivery Phase approval	June 2029
PCNPA Members approve	June 2029
Submission of application for Delivery Phase	July 2029
HLF decision on Delivery Phase application	October 2029
Delivery Phase commences	December 2029 – January 2038
Handover	January 2038
End of Project Review	March 2038
Benefits Review (2yrs post-project)	March 2040
Benefits Review (5yrs post-project)	March 2043

Partnership and Governance

The Development Phase (June 2027 – May 2029) has been specifically designed to build organisational readiness, strengthen partnership arrangements and reduce delivery risk before significant capital and project investment is committed.

Most consents, surveys and permissions required for physical delivery will be identified and developed during the Development Phase. Provision has been made within the project to undertake ecological, heritage, access and feasibility studies, ensuring that Delivery Phase proposals are fully evidenced, costed and implementation-ready prior to Gate 2 approval.

Governance arrangements are already established and include:

- A joint National Trust Cymru–PCNPA Project Board providing strategic oversight and decision-making.
- A Project Team responsible for project development and delivery planning.
- Defined workstream leadership across farming, land management, engagement, heritage and partnership development.

A Partnership Agreement covering both the Development and Delivery Phases is being developed and is expected to be approved through the relevant legal, grants, senior leadership and governance processes within both organisations in due course.

The Development Phase will draw on a combination of project-funded roles, existing organisational capacity (both organisations) and specialist external support.

Core posts have been identified and are included within the Development Phase budget. Specialist external consultancy support will be commissioned where additional expertise is required in areas such as sector analysis, partnership development, stakeholder engagement, monitoring and evaluation, and technical design.

The team will be led by a dedicated Project Manager - working across both organisations to provide overall coordination across workstreams and partner organisations.

3. Consultation

The project team are currently consulting with key partner agencies, seeking their formal support for the 'Pembrokeshire Landscapes Connections' bid to the HLF. If approved, the current partnership approach between PCNPA and NTC will be expanded to help co-create programmes of work and long-term solutions designed to drive long-term landscape-scale nature recovery across the coastal landscapes of Pembrokeshire.

4. Strategic Policy Context

'Pembrokeshire Landscape Connections' will be the biggest single project undertaken by the Park Authority in recent history. By working in close partnership with National Trust Cymru, we will create lasting landscape-scale change by

restoring and connecting habitats, supporting nature-friendly farming, reconnecting people with nature and heritage, and strengthening the partnerships needed to deliver nature recovery across Pembrokeshire. Working with farmers, landowners, communities and public bodies, the project will contribute to Wales' 30x30 ambition while improving biodiversity, climate resilience, wellbeing and access to nature.

Beyond delivering practical conservation outcomes, the project seeks to drive systems change by building trusted relationships, demonstrating the benefits of nature-friendly land management through evidence and 'lived' examples, aligning investment and policy priorities, and creating new models of collaboration across the National Park.

The legacy will be a network of better connected and more resilient habitats, empowered communities, stronger farm clusters and enduring partnerships that continue to champion nature recovery after the project ends. The learning, evidence and approaches developed will help shape future policy, funding and landscape recovery initiatives across Wales.

National Park Management Partnership Themes	Authority Well-being Objectives
Conservation – Conserving and enhancing natural beauty and wildlife	Conservation: To deliver nature recovery and connectivity at scale, so nature is flourishing in the Park, contributing to the protection of 30% of our land and seas for nature by 2030
Climate and natural resources – Managing natural resources sustainably	Climate: To achieve a carbon neutral Authority by 2030 and support the Park to achieve carbon neutrality and adapt to the impact of climate change.
Connection – Conserving and enhancing natural beauty and wildlife	Connection: To create a Park that is a natural health service that supports people to be healthier, happier and more connected to the landscape, nature and heritage.
Communities – Landscapes for lives and livelihoods	Communities: To create vibrant, sustainable and prosperous communities in the Park that are places people can live, work and enjoy.

5. Financial and Risk Considerations

Whilst the 'Pembrokeshire Landscape Connections' project aims to secure a £12.9m investment in long-term landscape-scale nature recovery across the coastal landscapes of Pembrokeshire the project still presents a number of financial challenges for the Park Authority that will need to be carefully managed.

Funding for the project is anticipated to comprise:

- HLF grant funding (up to 80% and £10m max across development and delivery years)

- Partnership match funding from National Trust Cymru and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (minimum 20%).

Staff Time

In particular, there are distinct phases to the project where staff time and resources are un-funded, meaning that the Authority is committing a significant resource without any guarantee of securing related HLF funding.

These phases include:

- All work undertaken to date (i.e. from Nov' 2024 to Sept' 2026).
- The period between submitting the HLF Round 1 bid and receiving grant-aid funding (i.e. from Sept 2026 to June 2027).
- The period between the Development Phase of the project and the Delivery Phase of the project (i.e. from June 2029 to Nov' 2029)

However, the risks associated with the staff time commitments above are deemed to be manageable due to the potential opportunity of unlocking such a significant long-term tranche of funding to accelerate long-term landscape-scale nature recovery in the National Park.

Match Funding

NTC and PCNPA will each need to secure 50% of the Development Phase (June 2027 – May 2029) match funding requirement, plus 50% each of the Interim transitional period costs (time gap between submission and NHLF approvals). Match funding must be confirmed before any HLF grant can be awarded.

Subject to a successful HLF Round 1 outcome (HLF decision expected in March 2027) and "Permission to Start" from HLF, we estimate the project will start the Development Phase in June 2027.

Following completion of the Development Phase, a Phase 2 paper will be brought forward for approval prior to submission of a full HLF Delivery Phase application.

The Delivery Phase is currently anticipated to have a value of £11.75m with funding expected to comprise HLF support (up to a total of £10m maximum across development and delivery phases) and associated match funding of £2.7M from partner organisations and external sources.

The full breakdown of funding is detailed below:

Project Phase	PCNPA	NTC	HLF	TOTAL
Development (June 27 – May 29)	£0.13m	£0.13m	£0.88m	£1.14m
Delivery (Dec 29 – Jan 38)	£1.35m	£1.35m	£9.05m	£11.75m

In summary, the project will require PCNPA to generate match funding of approximately £1.48m over the 10-year life of the project. It is anticipated that this will come from a variety of sources including external fundraising and regular discussions are currently being undertaken with the NT to discuss how to access this funding. While we hope that most of the additional funding will come from external sources, an allocated reserve of £100k has been created to assist the process of accessing HLF funding for the Development Phase.

One significant risk to the Authority's ambition to generate £1.48m in match funding is the current turnover of staff in the Finance Team with the Head of Finance and Fundraising, External Funding Manager and Funding Officer posts all soon to be vacant. However, discussions are currently taking place regarding recruitment in these areas and it is expected that these posts will be filled before June 2027, when work to secure the match-funding will need to commence.

6. Risk and Compliance Considerations

Any project of this scale inevitably carries significant risks. As a result, a bespoke summary of risks is attached separately to this report (please see Appendix 1). It is proposed that a separate 'Pembrokeshire Landscape Connections' risk is also added to the Park Authority's risk register to help the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Members manage all risks associated with such a large-scale ambitious project.

In particular, it is a considered risk to commit so much senior staff time to the 'Pembrokeshire Landscape Connections' project when the pressures on both the Authority's finances and staffing resources are at an all-time high. However, the 'Pembrokeshire Landscape Connections' project sits at the very heart of PCNPA's priorities (i.e. to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of the area).

As fears rise over future funding of protected landscapes, the coming together of two pivotal conservation organisations in Pembrokeshire (i.e. Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority and National Trust Cymru) to accelerate and deepen our collective response to both the climate and nature emergencies is seen as being essential to safeguarding the National Park's special qualities for future generations.

7. Impact on our Public Sector Duties

7.1 Integrated Assessment Completed: No

As the project is presently still in development there isn't sufficient information available to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) at this stage. However, a full IIA will need to be undertaken in advance of the Delivery Phase of the project (i.e. just prior to the Round 2 bid in November 2029).

7.2 Equality, Socio-Economic, Health and Human Rights Impacts

As above – the project is still in development but is likely to have a positive impact on people from protected groups through the wellbeing, skills, employability and

conservation opportunities supported through the associated 'Pembrokeshire Landscape Connections' workstreams. The Head of Engagement and Inclusion will provide bespoke advice and guidance to the Project Team as to how to maximise positive impacts for people from protected groups during the Development Phase of the project (i.e. from June 2027 to May 2029).

7.3 Welsh Language Impacts

The project will be designed in accordance with the Park Authority's Welsh Language Standards and meet our commitment to ensure that both Welsh and English are treated equally in the conduct of our business. In particular, the project will support the three main objectives of the Park Authority's Welsh Language Promotion Strategy as outlined below:

- Objective 1 - Promoting use of Welsh every day across the Authority, by staff, Members and volunteers.
- Objective 2- Promoting use of Welsh every day across our services, projects and activities, by the public and service users.
- Objective 3: Promoting use of Welsh every day across all parts of the National Park.

7.4 Section 6 Biodiversity Duty and Carbon Emission Impacts

The 'Pembrokeshire Landscape Connections' project will form the backbone of much of the conservation work of both PCNPA and NTC over the next decade and beyond. Our joint commitment to drive long-term landscape-scale nature recovery across the coastal landscapes of Pembrokeshire demonstrates our commitment to meeting the Section 6 Biodiversity.

Similarly, the project will involve a range of procurement opportunities that will be designed during the Development Phase of the project to have positive impacts on:

- biodiversity including biodiversity enhancement opportunities
- reducing carbon emissions for the wider park
- climate adaptation

7.5 Well-being Goals for Wales and 5 Ways of Working (Sustainable Development Principles) Impacts

As above, the development of such a long-term project with lasting outcomes for accelerating nature-friendly land management, stronger ecological networks and deeper connections between people, land, food, heritage and nature, clearly demonstrates the Park Authority's commitment to the Well-Being Goals for Wales and the Sustainable Development Principle as set out below:

- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales
- A healthier Wales
- A more equal Wales

- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
- A globally responsible Wales

Sustainable Development Principles:

- Long Term
- Prevention
- Integration
- Collaboration
- Involvement

8. Conclusion

The climate and nature emergencies require an accelerated and more deeply focussed approach to support improved outcomes for nature, landowners and communities in Pembrokeshire. By combining efforts across both PCNPA and NTC we hope that the 'Pembrokeshire Landscape Connections' project will secure a £12.9m investment that will drive long-term landscape-scale nature recovery across the coastal landscapes of Pembrokeshire.

(For further information please contact James Parkin,
jamesp@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk)

Appendix 1 - Risks, Issues and Opportunities

Risk / Issues / Opportunities	Likelihood 1 = Low, 5 = High	Impact 1 = Low, 5 = High	Score Likelihood x Impact	Actions Avoid / Reduce / Transfer / Accept
Unable to secure sufficient match funding required for Development & Delivery Phases	4	5	20	Reduce – Early engagement with funders; coordinated fundraising plan; exploration of underwriting options with NTC and PCNPA; appointment of a dedicated Fundraising Consultant within the Development Phase team to develop and implement a Delivery Phase fundraising strategy
Failure to deliver key application components in time for submission deadline (Nov 2026)	3	5	15	Reduce – ensure there is a clear deliverables tracker, with defined ownership, and establish regular workstream leads check-in meetings to monitor progress, risks, issues and blockers.
Insufficient capacity across NTC, PCNPA and project team (including part-time PM resource) impacts delivery	4	4	16	Reduce – Establish clear workstream ownership, central tracking and prioritisation of critical activities, supported by project-funded posts and internal staff support from both NTC and PCNPA.
Delays or gaps in inputs from workstream leads due to competing priorities and lack of direct line management	4	5	20	Reduce – Formal workstream check-ins; clear deadlines; visibility via central tracker
Inability to retain key staff due to lack of funding between Development and Delivery phases	3	5	15	Reduce – interim staffing costs included within agreed partner match funding commitments for critical roles
Low levels of engagement or commitment from farmers and landowners limit project impact	3	4	12	Reduce – Early engagement, stakeholder mapping, clear communication, use of case

				studies and existing relationships
Changes in Welsh Government policy (e.g. farming schemes) impact assumptions and stakeholder confidence	3	4	12	Reduce – Maintain alignment with policy; design flexible delivery approach; ongoing stakeholder engagement
The project operates within a complex partnership landscape. Without clear coordination and alignment, there is a risk it does not fully realise its potential to convene partners, complement existing activity and drive system-level change.	3	5	15	Partnership Agreement Defined roles Partnership development support Governance structures Alignment with Naturfa and Super NNR initiatives
Change in organisational priorities impacts ongoing collaboration between NTC and PCNPA	2	5	10	Reduce/Avoid – Develop strong Partnership Agreement; clear governance and escalation routes; regular senior engagement
Variation in organisational processes and capacity, particularly procurement, impacts timely commissioning	3	4	12	Reduce – Early alignment of processes; clear procurement planning in Development Phase; coordination via Project Coordinator
Delays in recruiting or retaining key project staff impact delivery	3	4	12	Reduce – Early planning; wide advertising; flexible roles; clear communication of fixed-term opportunities Use internal redeployment or short-term consultancy support
Costs exceed budget due to inflation or underestimation	3	3	9	Reduce – Include contingency and inflation assumptions, regular budget monitoring Reprioritise activities or phase delivery
Opportunity: Demonstrate a high-profile, scalable NTC–PCNPA partnership model	4	5	20	Actions: Exploit – Clearly position partnership in bid; showcase joint working and shared outcomes
Opportunity: Strong alignment with Welsh Government	5	5	25	Exploit – Ensure clear articulation of strategic

priorities (SFS, 30x30, Nature Networks)				alignment and contribution to policy outcomes
--	--	--	--	---

