

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

SUBJECT:
STRATEGIC GRANT LETTER – 2012/13

Introduction

Associated with the annual National Park Grant the Welsh Government sets out a series of priority objectives for the National Park Authorities to achieve in the Strategic Grant Letter. The letter for 2012/13 is included for Members' information.

(For further information contact Alan Hare – Head of Business Management on ext 4810)

John Griffiths AC /AM
Gweinidog yr Amgylchedd a Datblygu Cynaliadwy
Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref

To : The Chairs of the 3
National Park Authorities

Dear Chairs,

30 March 2012

My officials have already advised you of the resources being made available by the Welsh Government in support of your work in 2012 – 2013 – details at Annex 1. The purpose of this letter is to highlight the priority areas on which the Welsh Government would wish to see these resources being targeted in the year ahead.

You'll already be familiar with the **Programme for Government** the Welsh Government's road map for this Assembly term. It places a greater emphasis on how the Welsh Government is impacting on the lives of the people of Wales. The priority outcomes are: healthy people living productive lives in a more prosperous and innovative economy; safer and more cohesive communities, with lower levels of poverty and greater equality; a resilient environment with more sustainable use of our natural resources and a society with a vital sense of its own culture and heritage. The National Parks and Park Authorities are in the useful position of being able to make an impact across the Programme for Government. You should aim to increase your efforts in demonstrating the value of this impact and strive to make a significant contribution across the priorities identified in the Programme for Government, working alongside key partners at the national and local level.

In line with the Programme for Government the Welsh Government is in the process of reviewing the way we manage the environment. Under the banner "Sustaining a Living Wales" a more integrated approach to managing the natural environment that improves the health of ecosystems is being developed. The work carried out in the National Parks, and in particular by the Park Authorities is widely seen as exemplar in the care and improvement of the natural environment. I would like to see the National Park Authorities continue to take an active role in taking forward the principles behind "Sustaining a Living Wales" and to contribute to the discussions on its development and implementation.

A key commitment for the Welsh Government this Assembly term is to improve public rights of way and wider access opportunities, in particular for children and families. The Wales Coast Path will soon be formally launched and will help to focus people on the growing opportunities for access in Wales. I expect the Park Authorities to continue their work with the constituent local authorities to find ways of increasing access to the National Park for all sectors of society making linkages to organisations outside the Parks to achieve this objective.

An effective planning service is key to balancing the socio-economic needs of local communities and the protection of landscape and the natural environment. Prioritisation in

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line with the recently updated Planning Policy Wales and Technical Advice Note 6 is crucial to making development control an open, efficient service, providing sound, consistent decisions in which communities can have confidence.

As local planning authorities for your areas, I am looking to you to continue to maintain the improvements in planning services made in recent years. I am pleased with the good progress made by the Park Authorities to date in developing your local development plans, which should provide a framework for sustainable land use planning across the Park Authority, including planning for affordable housing and supporting biodiversity.

In 2012 a new duty will be placed on a range of public bodies across the UK, including the requirement for planning authorities to take appropriate steps to secure the preservation, maintenance or re-establishment of sufficient diversity and area of habitats for wild birds in the United Kingdom in line with Article 3 of the EU Birds Directive. The duty will be imposed under planned amendments to the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. The Welsh Government will soon be in contact with your Authority regarding the detail. I want to see the park authorities taking the lead with partners including CCW to act on this duty.

The Welsh Government is placing a strong emphasis on tackling poverty in Wales. Ministers want to see our partners, including Park Authorities, target services, where appropriate, at the most deprived areas of Wales. The aim is to reduce the gaps that exist between families living in low-income households and their more affluent peers in terms of health, education & skills and economic outcomes. The Park Authorities are already very active in promoting social inclusion but I think more can be done to improve community participation in environmental projects in deprived areas. In so doing, you will be making a contribution to tackling the poverty agenda in Wales.

Work is ongoing to review the **National Parks' Policy Statement**. I am pleased that the Park Authorities and many of their partners have already usefully contributed to the review process. The document will be less extensive than the current version but will form one element in a suite of measures to improve accountability, and the governance relationship between the Parks Authorities and the Welsh Government. One of the changes will be to introduce outcome based indicators for the Parks. I would like to see the Park Authorities work closely with Welsh Government officials to develop these indicators in order to ensure the maximum value and benefits of the information collected.

Reflecting the above strategic issues, I have identified in Annex 2 of this letter the priority objectives which I want the Park Authorities to focus on delivering in 2012-2013. I would also expect that you continue where appropriate to implement on going targets which have been contained in your previous strategic grant letters.

In line with the current arrangements, I expect you to arrange for the Welsh Government to receive brief six monthly reports on progress this autumn and again in the spring of 2013. I look forward to working with you in the coming year.



John Griffiths AM

Y Gweinidog dros yr Amgylchedd a Datblygu Cynaliadwy
Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development

Priority Objectives 2012/13

Governance:

1. To **operate effectively and efficiently** and to:
 - a. work with the Welsh Government officials to establish a new way of demonstrating progress and accountability by the Park Authorities;
 - b. work together continue to make progress towards achieving the Customer Service Excellence Standard by end 2012/13; and
 - c. to implement principles outlined in the Strategic Policy Statement for Protected Areas in place by the end of 2012.

Natural beauty:

2. Continue to integrate **biodiversity** mitigation, compensation and enhancement into new developments through the planning system, and demonstrate how you are supporting others to effectively use the planning system to safeguard biodiversity.
3. To note the imminent new duty under Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 to take such steps as you consider necessary to ensure a sufficient diversity and area of bird habitat; and to report to the Welsh Government how the Authority plans to put this into practice.
4. To report on priorities and activities to promote and safeguard the **cultural heritage** of the Parks.
5. To report on the health of Park ecosystems using the monitoring approaches developed by each park authority during 2011/12.

Enjoyment and understanding:

6. To report on progress made to implement the Park Authority's recreation strategy in order to promote enjoyment of the Parks' special qualities from all sectors of society, protecting the environment, and delivering an economic benefit.
7. To utilise the special qualities of the Parks in contributing to **life-long learning**, and in particular to support opportunities for schools within and near to the Parks to access learning opportunities outside the classroom.
8. Snowdonia and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authorities to identify and provide evidence to Welsh Government officials on the economic and social importance of the coast, seascapes and wider marine interests to the National Parks.

Sustainable communities:

9. To demonstrate and report on how plans and programmes contribute to supporting the **social and economic well-being** of the Park's local communities, and to review the evidence on the economic significance of National Parks in Wales.
10. To make provision to enable **affordable housing**, and to work with the local housing authority/ies on delivery of affordable housing targets.

National Park Grant from the Welsh Assembly Government

Snowdonia National Park Authority: £4,503,153 (£6,120,870 with the levy and additional capital funding)

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority: £3,554,853 (£4,856,470 with the levy and additional capital funding)

Brecon Beacons National Park Authority: £3,402,253 (£4,653,003 with the levy and additional capital funding)

Sustainable Development Fund

£200,000 is to be ring-fenced by each Park Authority to support projects within, or in close proximity to the Parks. Resources required to pay for the administration of the fund in each Park must be found from within each authority's budget. As part of the report required on the targets below I expect a section outlining how the £200,000 has been spent.

11. Identify those who traditionally make less use of national parks and actively encourage meaningful **participation** by these groups in activities within the National Park.

Climate change:

12. To collaborate with each other, neighbouring authorities and regional and local partnerships to meet national targets on **carbon reduction**, in line with the Welsh Government's commitment to reduce emissions by 3% per year, and to demonstrate and report on reductions in greenhouse gas emissions by the Park Authority.
13. Demonstrate the effectiveness of schemes already in place in the National Park and what is being done to promote exemplar projects for use in other areas of Wales.
14. Demonstrate that the Park Authority is working to identify the risks posed by climate change by having regard to the Welsh Government Statutory guidance Preparing for a Changing Climate, and is informing the action being taken to **adapt and mitigate** through land management, reporting on activity and progress by March 2013.
15. To continue to deliver, support, and champion **sustainable transport** provision within and around the Parks for the benefit of visitors and local communities; and ensure that the Park Authority provides a meaningful response to any proposals made under the white paper for the Highways and Transport Bill.

Planning:

16. To demonstrate that each Park is building on improvements in performance made in **development management** since the Wales Audit Office Parks Review of 2009; in particular to continue to determine planning applications to agreed timetables, reduce the backlog of planning applications, and take action on planning cases where enforcement action is necessary.
17. Continue to engage with the Welsh Government's Planning Division in relation to the Planning Review of Protected Areas and provide a meaningful response to any recommendations made in the resulting report.

