

# NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

11<sup>th</sup> May 2011

Present: Mr R Howells (Chairman)

Mrs G Hayward and Mrs F Lanc; Councillors JS Allen-Mirehouse, JA Brinsden, RN Hancock, SL Hancock, M James, PJ Morgan, WL Raymond and M Williams; Messrs D Ellis and EA Sangster.

(NPA offices, Llanion Park, Pembroke Dock: 10.00a.m. – 11.15a.m.)

## 1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors RR Evans, HM George and RM Lewis.

## 2. Chairman's Announcements

- (a) The Chairman reported how pleased he had been to preside over a meeting of the National Park Authority in the City of St Davids, and hoped that holding meetings outside of Pembroke Dock would strengthen the links between the Authority and those who live and work in it.
- (b) The Chairman and the Chief Executive had attended the opening of an art exhibition by a local artist Ian Jacob at the Picton Castle Gallery. The exhibition had a direct connection with that at Oriel y Parc, which the Chairman had formally opened on the 16<sup>th</sup> April. The latter exhibition was based on the sea and coast of Pembrokeshire, and he was supported by Mrs G Hayward and Councillor M James at the opening event, which was attended by well over 50 people.
- (c) The new cafe at Oriel y Parc had opened on the same day as the official opening of the exhibition at the Centre, and the Chairman was pleased to report that it appeared to be doing quite well.
- (d) The Chairman and the Chief Executive had had an interesting and forthright meeting with Simon Hart, MP.
- (e) The Chairman and Chief Executive, along with Councillors JA Brinsden and M Williams and Mr EA Sangster, had been interviewed by members of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales in connection with the Panel's new remit for determining allowances for Members of the National Park Authorities and Fire and Rescue Authorities.
- (f) The Vice-Chairman had attended the latest National Park Wales meeting on his behalf. Officers from the Welsh Assembly Government, Countryside Council for Wales and the Campaign for National Parks were also present.
- (g) The Chairman had attended the Friends of Pembrokeshire National Park's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary dinner. He had always endeavoured to strengthen the links between both organisations as there was a wealth of skills and experience within the Friends' membership.



- (h) New regulations had required Ms C Gwyther to relinquish her post on the Authority in order to enable her to stand for the recent Assembly elections. Ms Gwyther had made a valuable contribution to the work of the Authority during her term of office and he wished to thank her formally for her vital input.
- (i) Welsh Assembly Government officials had assured him that the appointment for Ms Gwyther's and his replacement would commence as soon as the new Minister had been appointed following the recent elections.
- (j) The undergrounding of cables at Strumble Head had now been completed, and extensive media coverage had been received for a job well done.
- (k) The Chairman referred sadly to the fact that Mr Gerry Quarrell had recently passed away. Mr Quarrell had been a senior advisor with the Welsh Assembly Government and had not only been a personal friend but a friend to the Authority. It was **RESOLVED** that the Chairman write to Mr Quarrell's family to express Members' condolences.

### **3. Disclosures of interest**

No disclosures of interest were received.

### **4. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 30<sup>th</sup> March 2011 were presented for confirmation and signature.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on the 30<sup>th</sup> March 2011 be confirmed and signed.

### **5. Development Management Committee – reports of Meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** that the report of the meeting of the Development Management Committee held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2011 be received.

### **6. Member Development Strategy Working Group – report of Meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** that the report of the meeting of the Member Development Strategy Working Group held on the 30<sup>th</sup> March 2011 be adopted.

### **7. Conservation Area Grants Panel – report of Meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** that the report of the meeting of the Conservation Area Grants Panel held on the 8<sup>th</sup> April 2011 be received.

### **8. Complaints about procedure (and others) of the Bettws Newydd planning applications and subsequent appeal**

Prior to introducing his report, the Monitoring Officer informed Members that correspondence had been received from the Bettws Newydd Opposition Group in which they detailed a number of points that



they considered had not been properly covered by the report. In the interest of openness and fairness, the Monitoring Officer placed the correspondence before Members and asked that the meeting be adjourned to enable Members to read its contents.

*(The meeting stood adjourned for 5 minutes.)*

He then went on to say that the purpose of his report was to respond to complaints raised by Newport Town Council, the Bettws Newydd Opposition Group (BNOG) and other members of the public in relation to the way in which they considered the Authority had dealt with planning applications for the erection of a dwelling known as Bettws Newydd on The Parrog, Newport. He stated that his conclusions were based on the evidence available and the report included recommendations to introduce administrative and other processes to assist in the provision of a more robust planning service in the longer term.

He referred in particular to the recommendations at the end of his report, adding that there was no room for complacency and it would now be a matter for the Membership and the Senior Management Team to ensure that the necessary systems were put in place for the future. The Monitoring Officer concluded by saying that there were a number of awards and accolades on display in the Authority's reception area at headquarters, all of which had been won through great effort and enthusiasm by officers. The same should be applied in future to ensure that a similar incident did not happen again.

The Chief Executive Officer thanked the Monitoring Officer for an interesting and challenging report. Bettws Newydd had generated much public interest and it was only proper that the report should be made public, as the Authority was keen to be open and transparent and willing to learn from its mistakes. It was accepted that the procedures in place at the time were not as robust as they could have been, although that was not to say that they were totally inappropriate either, as the system had worked well for the numerous other cases dealt with during that period. Nevertheless, procedures had changed significantly since and the likelihood of such an incident being repeated had been diminished.

He added that the Authority would always aspire to do better, therefore he welcomed the Monitoring Officer's recommendations on how to improve the planning service. They would, undoubtedly, provide significant challenges, but the Authority would take reasonable steps to implement improved systems. He did, however, question some of the timescales referred to in the recommendations as the practical implications were difficult. He recommended that he report to the



Authority in October on the progress that had been made on the recommendations.

The Chief Executive Officer concluded by saying that he hoped Bettws Newydd was an isolated case and not a reflection on the general quality of the planning service. Recent Wales Audit Office reports showed that there was a far more robust system in place.

Members took the opportunity to thank the Monitoring Officer for a very comprehensive report concerning what had been a painful experience for all concerned. They accepted that mistakes had been made, but the Authority had learned from the experience and had implemented many changes in systems and processes.

The Chairman regretted the fact that Newport Town Council were not treated with the respect and efficiency due; he had tried hard during his term of office to work with the Town and Community Councils, but there was an obvious need to mend bridges in some areas. He wished to add that he was of the opinion that the Bettws Newydd Opposition Group did what they felt was right. Their determination had been a contributory factor to the Authority putting its house in order and so they had served a very useful purpose in this regard.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- (a) that the report of the Monitoring Officer on Complaints about procedure (and others) of the Bettws Newydd planning applications and subsequent appeal be received and noted, and
- (b) that the Chief Executive Officer be tasked with reporting to the Authority at its meeting scheduled to be held on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 2011 on progress made in implementing the recommendations contained in the Monitoring Officer's report.

*(Mrs F Lanc and Councillor JS Allen-Mirehouse were not present when the report on the Annual Governance Statement for 2010/11 [Minute 9 below refers] was considered.)*

## **9. Annual Governance Statement for 2010/11**

The Chief Financial Officer reminded Members that, at their meeting held on the 12<sup>th</sup> May 2010, he had reported on how the Local Government Measure would replace the Wales Programme for Improvement as the methodology to assess local authorities' performance in future years. Each local authority was expected to prepare a Code of Corporate Governance and to annually assess their performance against this Code. Officers from the three Welsh National Park Authorities had



drafted a common Code of Corporate Governance, and this had been adopted at the May meeting.

The Annual Governance Statement now being presented to Members provided the first assessment against the six principles set out in the adopted Code of Corporate Governance. Members could see that there were three sections to the Statement; the first giving an overview of the purpose of the Governance framework; the second reviewing the Authority's performance against the Code over the last 12 months; whilst the third section identified any significant issues that had arisen as a result of the review together with details of the action to be taken to resolve these issues.

The Chief Financial Officer reported that the Continuous Improvement Group had considered the report in detail at its meeting held on the 13<sup>th</sup> April 2011.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Annual Governance Statement for 2010/11 be approved and that it be formally submitted to the Wales Audit Office.

*(The Chairman tendered his apologies at this juncture and left the meeting. The Vice-Chairman, Councillor JA Brinsden, chaired the remainder of the meeting in his place.)*

#### **10. Winter car parking charges at Oriel y Parc**

The Head of Business Management reminded Members that visitors to the Authority's car park at Oriel y Parc were required to pay to park throughout the year, while visitors to Saundersfoot, Manorbier and Freshwater East were invited only to make a donation when parking during the winter months. He added that Pembrokeshire County Council had adopted the same practice during the winter at their sites.

It was, therefore, recommended that, on a trial basis for the forthcoming winter period only, car parking charges at the Oriel y Parc car park be replaced with an option to make a donation

It was **RESOLVED** that the recommendation of the Head of Business Management be adopted, and that the matter be reviewed in the Spring of 2012.

#### **11. Terms of Reference**

Members were reminded that, at the meeting of the Authority held on the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2010, they had agreed to disband the Performance Review Committee and, in its place, establish three smaller Committees to focus on the three 'Directorates' within the Authority.



The report before them that day presented draft Terms of Reference for each of the three new Committees, i.e. the Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee, the Conservation and Planning Review Committee and the Recreation and Tourism Review Committee.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Terms of Reference set out in the report of the Administration and Democratic Services Manager be adopted.

## **12. Nominations to Office**

It was reported that Members had, for more than six years, followed custom and practice whereby nominations to the offices of Chair and Vice-Chair of the Authority and its Committees had been required to be submitted in writing beforehand. The report prepared by the Administration and Democratic Services Manager invited Members to formalise a practice that had become established over the years.

It was **RESOLVED** that the procedure set out in the report be adopted and that the Authority's Standing Orders be amended accordingly.

## **13. Review of external organisations to which Members were appointed to represent the National Park Authority**

The Administration and Democratic Services Manager reported that Member representation on external organisations was considered at the Annual General Meeting each year. Following comments made by Members the year previously, and in light of the Authority's limited resources, a cursory review had been undertaken to explore how the Authority's representation on those organisations could best be served. The report before Members that day set out the findings of that review, indicating whether representation should continue or not with a particular organisation. It was pointed out at the meeting that the Cardigan Bay Advisory Group had inadvertently been omitted from the summary annexed to the report, but it was recommended that the Authority remain associated with that body as it was considered to be a 'Relevant Authority' in relation to the Marine Special Area of Conservation.

The Administration and Democratic Services Manager went on to propose that a criteria-based approach should be adopted in future when deciding whether or not the Authority should be represented on external organisations, and this was set out in Annex 3 to her report. Such an approach would ensure that the Authority's investment of energy and resources was used as effectively as possible to help the Authority achieve its purposes and priorities.

She went on to say that a feedback system should also be introduced, which not only would enable other Members to be kept informed of



developments with partner organisations, but which would provide a monitoring/review mechanism of the partnership.

Members welcomed the approach set out in the report as it would ensure that the Authority would benefit from such partnerships.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- (a) that the report of the Administration and Democratic Services Manager be adopted and that the criteria-based approach set out in Annex 3 be introduced with immediate effect;
- (b) that the findings set out in Annex 2 to the report be endorsed, together with the recommendation made at the meeting with regard to the Cardigan Bay Advisory Group, and
- (c) that the Member Development Strategy Working Group be tasked with developing a mechanism for reporting back on meetings attended with external organisations/bodies.

**14. Other Items of business that by reason of special circumstance, the Chairman decided should be considered as a matter of urgency, pursuant to Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972**

(a) Joint Scrutiny Project with the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority

The Chief Executive Officer reminded Members that the Authority was working with the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority on a joint scrutiny project, which was looking at introducing a culture of scrutiny into the two Authorities. To date, two Member training sessions had been held, facilitated by an expert advisor from the Centre for Public Scrutiny. The project was now ready to undertake a pilot scrutiny review on the effectiveness of the Sustainable Development Fund in establishing low carbon communities. The joint Scrutiny Committee comprised four Members from each Authority, and one additional Member was needed to join Mr EA Sangster and Councillors SL Hancock and M James for the duration of the exercise.

It was **RESOLVED** that Ms F Lanc become involved in the joint Scrutiny Project.

(b) National Trust car park at Stackpole

Councillor JS Allen-Mirehouse stated that the National Trust had introduced a pay and display machine in its car park at Stackpole, and the residents in the area were now worried that people would park on the road instead, leading to increased traffic congestion in



the area. He asked whether the Authority could liaise with the National Trust in an effort to resolve the situation.

The Chief Executive Officer replied that officers would look into the matter.

**NOTED.**

