

NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

24th September 2014

Present: Councillor M James (Chair)
Mr A Archer, Mr D Ellis, Councillor P Harries, Mrs G Hayward,
Councillors S Hudson, O James, Mrs L Jenkins, B Kilmister, RM
Lewis, PJ Morgan, R Owens and DWM Rees, Mrs M Thomas,
Councillor A Wilcox and Councillor M Williams.

Ms C Gwyther joined the meeting during consideration of the Wales
Audit Office's ISA260 Report to those charged with governance
(*Minute 7 below refers*).

(NPA Offices, Llanion Park, Pembroke Dock: 10.00a.m. – 11.50a.m.)

1. Apology

An apology for absence was received from Mr AE Sangster.

2. Disclosures of Interest

No disclosures of interest were made.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 6th August 2014 were
presented for confirmation and signature.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on the 6th
August 2014 be confirmed and signed.

4. Welcome

The Chairman welcomed Ms Sarah Mellor, who had recently been
appointed to the role of Biodiversity Officer within the Park Direction team,
to the meeting.

5. Development Management Committee – Report of Meeting

It was **RESOLVED** that the report of the meeting of the Development
Management Committee held on the 30th July 2014 be received.

6. Standards Committee Appointments Panel – Report of Meeting

It was **RESOLVED** that the report of the meeting of the Standards
Committee Appointments Panel held on the 22nd August 2014 be
adopted.

7. ISA260 Report to those charged with governance

The Chairman welcomed Mr Richard Harries of the Wales Audit Office
to the meeting. Mr Harries would be presenting to Members the
Appointed Auditor's Audit of Financial Statements Report for 2013/14.



In introducing the document, Mr Harries apologised for the fact that the report should have been presented to Members in August but, due to issues with the Audit Office's staffing side, this had not been possible. He wished to thank the Finance Manager for his patience while the staffing issues were being addressed, and the Finance team for the work undertaken to provide the evidence requested during the process. He stated that the work produced was to a very high standard and quality, and admitted that the Report was the best he had written for a number of years.

Mr Harries went on to say that it was a positive Report all told; and there were no recommendations for improvement to make. Going into greater detail, he stated that:

- his team had no concerns about the qualitative aspects of the Authority's accounting practices and financial reporting;
- his team did not encounter any significant difficulties during the audit process;
- there were no other matters significant to the oversight of the financial reporting process that needed to be reported to the Authority;
- his team did not identify any material weaknesses in the Authority's internal controls, and
- there were no other matters specifically required by auditing standards to be communicated to Members.

Finally, Mr Harries stated that he was aware of the Authority's concern about Wales Audit Office fees and stated that he was consulting with other Audit Offices on their fee process. He hoped that the Authority would "see movement going the right way" for 2014/15.

The Chief Executive informed Members that National Parks Wales had submitted a robust response to the Wales Audit Office's consultation on fees, and he hoped that the comments made would be taken into consideration.

Members congratulated the Finance Manager and his team for their work in ensuring that such a positive report was received.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- (a) that the ISA260 Report from the Wales Audit Office be accepted, and
- (b) that the Statement of Accounts for 2013/14 be approved.



8. Consultation on draft Technical Advice Note 1 (TAN 1): Joint Housing Land Availability Studies – National Parks Wales response

The Planning Officer (Park Direction) reported that all planning authorities in Wales were required to maintain a 5-year supply of readily developable land for housing. This land supply comprised land with planning permission for 5 or more dwellings, together with land allocated for residential development within an adopted Development Plan. All planning authorities undertook an annual land availability study, which was designed to help ensure that an adequate land supply was available.

She went on to say that the Welsh Government had now published a consultation on draft Technical Advice Note (TAN) 1: Joint housing land availability studies, and had published revised guidance on the preparation of land availability studies. The main changes proposed were highlighted in the report before Members that day, together with a draft joint response to the consultation document from the three Welsh National Park Authorities (NPA).

Broadly, the three NPA supported the revisions to TAN1, particularly with regard to the proposal to align the studies more closely with the Local Development Plan Annual Monitoring Report process and the proposed change in categorisation of sites. However, it was considered unfair to require an early review of the Development Plan if the land supply fell short of the 5-year requirement in the early years of the Plan period, and it was also suggested that a second method of calculation be introduced to take into account market trends.

Members reinforced the draft response of officers, stating that there was a dire need for realistic and reliable data about the housing market. They referred to the “land-banking” issue, where developers either did not build even though planning permission had been granted, or where landowners did not put forward suitable sites for development due to the current market climate, or because of planning policy. They asked how the problem could be overcome, to which officers reported that landowners were regularly contacted to ascertain whether they would be making sites available in the foreseeable future.

Members then referred to the Authority’s land at Sageston, the development of which would not count towards the Authority’s affordable housing target, but to Pembrokeshire County Council’s instead. They enquired whether the County Council would be prepared to release some of the land owned by it that lay within the National Park in return. Officers replied that there was a significant amount of County Council owned land within the National Park, but no indication was forthcoming that it was interested in releasing any of it. Members directed officers to draft a letter for the Chairman to send to the County Council registering Members’ disquiet on this matter.



It was **RESOLVED**:

- (a) that the draft joint consultation response to the Welsh Government's revised draft Technical Advice Note 1: Joint housing land availability studies be approved and submitted to Welsh Government, and
- (b) that a letter be sent to Pembrokeshire County Council regarding the release of suitable land within the National Park for housing development.

9. Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance: Enabling sustainable development in the Welsh National Parks

The Head of Park Direction reported that officers of the three Welsh National Park Authorities had been working together to prepare draft Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on Enabling sustainable development in the Welsh National Parks.

The guidance aimed at helping planning applicants to understand what sustainable development meant in the Welsh Parks, and to find the plans and policies relevant to their particular case. Subject to Members' approval, the SPG would be published for consultation in October 2014 for a period of three months, following which a report would be brought back to Members detailing the representations received, together with the Authority's response thereto.

Members asked for, and received from officers, clarification on a number of points, including the sections on camping, farm diversification and transport. Officers went on to say that Members were welcome to respond to the consultation process if they so wished. Officers agreed to address amendments suggested regarding cross references to policies and the Authority's pre-application service when reporting back on the consultation.

It was **RESOLVED** that the draft Supplementary Planning Guidance on Enabling sustainable development in the Welsh National Parks be approved for public consultation.

10. 2014 Annual Monitoring Report on the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Local Development Plan

Members were reminded that the Annual Monitoring Report on the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Local Development Plan (LDP) was produced each year. The document looked back over the previous financial year and assessed the extent to which the strategies and policies of the LDP were being achieved. The 2014 Annual Monitoring Report was appended to the report before Members that day for consideration.

The Head of Park Direction reported that this was the fourth Annual Monitoring Report, and the final one before work commenced on the



review of the LDP. She went on to say that Welsh Government officials had advised her that the Regulations for the review of Local Development Plans should be finalised by 2015. In the meantime, she and her officers were undertaking preparatory work for the review.

Members asked for clarification on a number of points, in particular with regard to housing land availability. They were concerned that the Authority was not hitting the targets set and referred to the extensive report issued by the Scrutiny Committee on affordable housing. Officers advised that there was no “quick fix” to resolving this issue, although Supplementary Planning Guidance had been published in an effort to try to address the problem while Welsh Government Regulations and guidance on the review of LDPs was awaited. Officers also agreed to edit the Annual Monitoring Report text regarding the Sustainability Appraisal commentary at paragraph 1.14 to include other issues that affected the poor performance on affordable housing delivery.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- (a) the 2014 Annual Monitoring Report for the Local Development Plan, subject to the amendment to paragraph 1.14, be approved for submission to the Welsh Government by the 31st October 2014, and
- (b) that officers be tasked with writing to the Welsh Government enquiring when the Regulations for the review of Local Development Plans would be published.

11. Complaints handling

Members considered the report of the Monitoring Officer, which proposed a revision to the Authority’s current process for dealing with complaints made against the Authority. The suggested revisions were detailed in the document appended to the report before Members that day, but the main point of revision was the introduction of a 12 month time limit from when the ‘incident’ occurred and the actual complaint being made. It was proposed that the Authority’s Service Standards comments and complaints booklet be amended to reflect the suggested amendments.

It was **RESOLVED** that the proposed changes to the complaints handling process and the Authority’s Service Standards – comments and complaints booklet be adopted.

12. Independent Member of the Standards Committee

The Monitoring Officer reminded Members that a vacancy had arisen on the Authority’s Standards Committee following the passing away of Mr Brian Powdrill. The vacancy had been advertised, and two applicants had been interviewed by the Standards Committee Appointments Panel on the 22nd August.



In accordance with Regulation 16(2) of the Standards Committee (Wales) Regulations 2001 and the Standards Committee (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2006, the Panel had recommended that Mrs Judith Wainwright be appointed with immediate effect for a period of 5 years.

It was **RESOLVED** that Mrs Judith Wainwright be appointed an Independent Member of the Standards Committee with immediate effect for a period of 5 years.

13. Volunteer Strategy and Action Plan 2014-16

It was reported that there had been a long tradition of volunteers working hand-in-hand with the National Park Authority, not only with practical conservation work but, more recently, with policy development and co-funded social inclusion projects.

The Volunteer Strategy and Action Plan presented to Members sought to define the Authority's future direction in providing opportunities for volunteering in the National Park. It took account of good practice in this area of activity and proposed a series of key objectives and related actions for the Authority to develop its work with volunteers in the years ahead.

Members acknowledged the valuable contribution made by volunteers to the work of the Authority. They welcomed the Strategy, but worried about the staff implications involved with the volunteering activity. The Discovery Team Leader replied that there were obvious limitations to what work could be undertaken, but officers were in the process of reviewing current volunteer engagement whilst also investigating possible sources of external funding.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Volunteer Strategy and Action Plan 2014-16 be endorsed.

14. Conservation Areas Review and the consideration of Article 4 Directions to reduce specific permitted development rights which impact on the quality of the Conservation Area

The Building Conservation Officer reminded Members that fourteen Conservation Areas had been identified within the National Park. These areas represented the settlements of greatest architectural and historic importance, of which unlisted – as well as listed – buildings played an extremely important part. All Conservation Areas were subject to a three-year rolling survey programme to look at both their general character and the condition of unlisted buildings, and it was considered that certain permitted development rights (e.g. the loss of traditional walled front gardens to car parking spaces) had affected the character of the Conservation Areas.



Article 4(2) of the General Permitted Development Order 1995 (as amended by the GPDO Amendment (Wales) Order 2013) Directions enabled local authorities to make a direction in respect of dwellings within a Conservation Area. This direction could be made where there was a “real and specific threat” of erosion of character to an area, and applied to non-listed residential dwellings fronting highways, waterways or open spaces.

The Building Conservation Officer went on to say that Article 4(2) Directions were only to be used in exceptional circumstances. However, following the most recent survey of the St Davids Conservation Area, it was considered that there was a “real and specific threat” to the character and appearance of the un-listed dwellings, therefore it was recommended that St Davids should be considered first priority for designation.

He then referred Members to his report, which detailed the proposed special planning controls to be the subject of the direction, and the procedure involved with the designation process itself. He added that a guidance note for householders had been drafted, and was appended to his report before Members that day. He went on to say that there would be no charge to the homeowner for an application for planning permission for works controlled by an Article 4(2) Direction.

Members welcomed the approach recommended by the Building Conservation Officer, but suggested that reference to the pre-application process should also be included in the guidance note.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- (a) that Directions were made pursuant to Classes A and F of Part 1 and Class A of Part 2 of Article 4(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (as amended 2013) in relation to the land within the St Davids Conservation Area highlighted on the map appended to the report of the Building Conservation Officer, and
- (b) that the guidance note to householders, as appended to the report of the Building Conservation Officer, be approved subject to the inclusion of reference to the pre-application process.

15. Grant approval in accordance with Section 78 of the Financial Standards (revised 2012)

It was reported that, in accordance with Section 78 of the Financial Standards 2012, Member authorisation was needed for payments made where the “total value grant and sponsorships under any one agreement” amounted to over £10,000.

Two such payments had been made during the current financial year: a payment of £20,000 to the Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum to help



integrate and manage coastal activity, and a payment of circa £72,000 to Pembrokeshire County Council as a contribution towards the Pembrokeshire Greenways Partnership. The full details of the payments were included in the report of the Finance Manager to Members that day.

It was **RESOLVED** that the payments made to the Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum and Pembrokeshire County Council in the sums of £20,000 and circa £72,000 respectively be approved.

16. Pension and Compensation Policy

Prior to the presentation of the Personnel Manager's report on a Pension and Compensation Policy, the Monitoring Officer advised Members that they should recognise that the proposed policy affected all employees of the National Park Authority. It was a policy that the Authority was obliged to review, and had been prepared by the appropriate officer for Members' consideration.

The Personnel Manager reported that the 2014 changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme and Discretionary Compensation Regulations required the Authority to review and update its policy decisions on those issues that were discretionary to it as an employing authority.

Details of the changes were appended to the report before Members that day. Members were advised that the existing policy, which formed the basis of the revised policy proposed, had supported recent staff changes effectively therefore no changes other than 'technical' ones were proposed. She went on to say that the policy could be reconsidered and changed at any time, subject to it being effective from one month after publication to staff.

It was **RESOLVED** that the revised Pension and Compensation Policy, as appended to the report of the Personnel Manager, be approved.

17. Protected Landscapes Policy Statement

The Chief Executive reported that the expected Policy Statement had not yet been published, probably due to the recent Cabinet re-shuffle in the National Assembly.

He went on to say that a letter had been sent to Carl Sargeant, AM congratulating him on his appointment as Minister for Natural Resources, and asking him for a meeting with the Chairman and Chief Executive.

NOTED.

