

REPORT OF HEAD OF PARK DELIVERY

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON PLANS FOR THE NATIONAL PARK SITE AT CILRHEDYN

Purpose of Report

To report on progress of the plans for a partnership of Coed Cymru and Tir Coed to take over the management of the Cilrhedyn Woodland Centre.

Introduction/Background

Members will recall that at the Authority Meeting in February 2016 it was agreed to work with a partnership of Coed Cymru and Tir Coed to find a new way to use the centre at Cilrhedyn and to reduce the costs of operation for the Authority. An update was provided to NPA in July of this year and a new progress report (attached) has been provided by the partnership.

Comparisons

These issues have been covered in previous papers but no National Park Authorities now operate sawmills and the idea of transferring assets into the hands of partnership for local delivery is well established.

Options

Progress has been made in obtaining grants towards the Coed Cymru post that the partnership hope to base at the centre but their plans for funding the centre itself depend on a grant application to the Coastal Communities Fund. This bid has passed the first stage of the assessment process but the second stage will not be completed until the end of March 2017 – this puts the possibility of a transfer of the building at Cilrhedyn back to June/July next year. This is a significant delay on the original timescale but retains the benefit to the authority that the site continues in a beneficial timber-related use while allowing continued use by the NPA as a warden and ranger base. In the interim the North Warden team continue to manage the centre and provide most of the countryside furniture required by the authority.

Financial considerations

The overall cost of the centre to the authority (Including the Warden / Ranger base) has reduced to £51,196 in 2015-6. This is expected to reduce further this year. The proposed delay from a January (as originally envisaged) to perhaps a July start of the agreement might be expected to cost around £15,000.

Risk considerations

There is a risk that this is a proposal where timescales have slipped already and that success is dependent on grant-aid funding; however the benefit of the partnership involvement and the opportunity to retain the Warden / Ranger base on this site while cutting the long-term costs of the site is very significant. The stage one process of the

Coastal Communities bid is, we understand, the most testing part of the bid process so it is reasonable to be optimistic about the funding chances for the partnership.

Compliance

The proposal meets NPA objectives and should allow a partner organisation to make better use of existing resources while reducing operating costs to the authority.

Human Rights/Equality issues

Staff concerned are being kept informed and we are reviewing options for redeployment or, if need be, redundancy. TUPE seems unlikely to apply. There should be no negative issues on services to the public.

Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal

This proposal does not conflict with any NPA priorities as long as there is a good facility available for the management of NPA assets in the north.

Welsh Language considerations

This proposal should have no Welsh language implications for the authority.

Wider implications

NPA held an open day two years ago and explored options with a range of partners; since this proposal has come up, the partnership has consulted a wide range of stakeholders in the preparation of their grant applications.

Conclusion

This is a report of progress on an already agreed principle; the timescale has had to be extended because of grant funding changes but the basis for the original decision remains valid.

RECOMMENDATION:

That members consider the report and authorise NPA staff to continue working with the partnership to agree interim arrangements for early 2017 with a view to agreeing a transfer as soon after the confirmation of available funding in late March 2017.

Background Documents

- Update on Plans for the National Park Site at Cilrhedyn, Report of Head of Park Delivery July 2016
- Future Use of The National Park Site at Cilrhedyn; Report of Director of Delivery and Discovery National Park Authority February 2016
- Future Use of The National Park Site At Cilrhedyn; Report of Director of Delivery and Discovery National Park Authority November 2015.
- Update Report on the Cilrhedyn Woodland Centre Operational Review Committee 15/10/2014
- Cilrhedyn Woodland Centre Verbal Update - Minutes of the meeting of the Operational Review Committee 22/04/2015
- Presentation by Coed Cymru & Tir Coed - Minutes of the meeting of the Operational Review Committee 01/07/2015

(For further information, please contact Charles Mathieson Head of Park Delivery)
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Coed Cymru and Tir Coed

Update to PCNP Authority on Cilrhedyn Timber Centre

November 2016

We have undertaken a significant amount of work exploring options and sourcing funding to take the proposals for the Cilrhedyn Timber Centre.

Funding was obtained from Pembrokeshire LEADER for a feasibility study which was completed in August 2016. Match funding to this was contributed by Tir Coed and Coed Cymru. The study looked at a number of case studies and concluded that:

'sufficient evidence exists to suggest that a successful and exciting future can be achieved at Cilrhedyn contributing to the delivery of wider objectives of Tir Coed and Coed Cymru subject to:

- Securing satisfactory terms with PCNPA for Cilrhedyn Woodland Centre
- Generate business plan based on detailed confirmation of identified opportunities.'

In September an EOI was put to the **Big Lottery Coastal Communities Fund** which has been approved to proceed to the full application stage, to:

'secure, re-focus and re-vitalise facilities at the Cilrhedyn Timber Centre, Fishguard, creating a hub for skills, productivity & employment in the West-Wales coastal region. We will grow the existing facility to meet emerging rural needs post-Brexit, as traditional support mechanisms are under threat. The project will make measurable increases in rural-prosperity, skills & employment, providing capacity in supply chains, drawing on the wider work of the two main partners Tir Coed and Coed Cymru and based on the sustainable use of natural resources & emerging NRM approaches.

The overall vision being: 'Pembrokeshire will be known for its vibrant skills based wood products sector, making productive, sustainable use of natural resources & new woodland will deliver multiple benefits across the rural landscape'.

The EOI contains funding of up to £257,000 to:

'Acquire the Cilrhedyn site; refocus the workshops, yard, drying shed & office space to create a 'space plus' business support model; undertake minor internal alterations to form separate units within the main building; provide practical & accredited skills/training for hard to reach individuals through Tir Coed activities; develop a mix of services at the site to support tenants based on the Feasibility Report; employ a Project Manager to develop the Centre and business clusters for the first two years; secure Enterprise Zone status (rate relief) & progression routes to business units at the nearby Trecwn facility; create clusters of enterprises based around the following 5 supply chains:

- Agricultural productivity cluster - Cilrhedyn will be the base for regional Coed Cymru/Tir Coed Officers, bringing the role of trees into agricultural productivity & addressing soil & water pressures. 76% of Pembrokeshire land is agricultural & 18.3% is arable lending itself to the use of trees. Funding for capital work will be drawn down through Glastir/RDP as part of other secured bids

- Woodfuel Cluster - matching woodfuel supplies from woodland management operations to regional markets using the site to address drying, consistency, processing, collating thinning from multiple parcels of woodland, & creating employment opportunities within the local supply chains
- Timber processing cluster - matching timber stocks, achieving drying & consistency based on identified supply chains & requirements, using the yard & drying shed. Access to equipment & machinery from a pool of existing equipment or through Timber Business Investment Scheme
- Skills, training & business incubation cluster - linking skills & training to business needs, progression routes, facilitating new business start-ups to access markets, skills, training, apprenticeships, supported workspaces, business support from partners
- New income opportunities & markets cluster - develop group access to Woodland Carbon Code & link to new Payments for Ecosystem Services models, new markets UK/developing trade agreements post Brexit, bring a design led approach to rural Wales

In addition, the 16.2 Cooperation Measure under the RDP has reopened. Coed Cymru will be bidding into this for a Wales wide project focussed on timber which could support Cilirhedyn. In addition Caerphilly County Borough Council are in the process of appointing a Timber Officer in conjunction with Coed Cymru and NRW, with which we may coordinate some activity.

Next Steps

- Agree terms of transfer of the site. Our preferred option would be to acquire the site at an agreed value and lease back space to PCNPA as recommended in the feasibility study
- Develop the full CCF bid, as going forward depends on this being approved. The project could start in June/July 2017 if successful.
- Develop a Business Plan and access further funding if this is required
- Agree an interim measures January - June 2017 including accommodation of new Tir Coed and Coed Cymru project officers.