

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF DELIVERY AND DISCOVERY

SUBJECT: NEWPORT VISITOR CENTRE

Purpose of Report

To extend the period of community engagement regarding potential changes to the future provision of visitor services in Newport until October 2017.

To keep the Newport Visitor Centre open for the entirety of the 2017 season with no changes to the present levels of service and/or opening hours.

Background

At the National Park Authority meeting held in Dale on the 28th September 2016, Members resolved to consult on proposals to change the way visitor information services are delivered in Tenby and Newport in the future. Members were unanimous in their desire to see the Authority change the nature of its current delivery in order to invest in a package of new initiatives aimed at supporting the growth of the wider visitor economy in Pembrokeshire by delivering a more equitable service across the National Park.

The Authority consequently launched a formal public consultation on proposed changes to visitor services in Newport and Tenby which closed on the 31st October 2016. In addition, public meetings were held in both Newport and Tenby in conjunction with a number of formal and informal meetings with stakeholder groups regarding both the impacts of any potential changes and the opportunities to deliver services differently.

At the last meeting of the Park Authority, held on the 30th November 2016, Members agreed to the closure of Tenby National Park Visitor Centre whilst granting more time for officers of the Authority to work with the community of Newport to explore alternative delivery options for the future. Formal meetings between the Authority and the community of Newport, represented via the Newport Visitor Centre Action Group, were held on the 6th December 2016 and the 4th January 2017. The meetings have been very positive and point to a willingness by the community to explore new models of securing the future of the Newport Visitor Centre building.

Next Steps

The local community generally remain opposed to the proposed closure of the visitor centre in Newport. Whilst they appreciate that the Park Authority is keen to explore ways of delivering services more equitably across the National Park they feel that the potential closure of the centre could have a negative impact on the town in the long run.

As a result, they are working closely with officers at PCNPA to see if the building can be acquired by the community to manage and run in future. The hope is that this will keep an important building for visitors and the wider community open whilst assisting the Authority to make savings that can, in turn, be invested in new ways of delivering visitor services across the wider National Park.

Discussions are at an early stage but the community, led by Newport Town Council, is keen to explore if, through community management, the Newport Visitor Centre can bring a number of local services 'under one roof', ensuring the continuation of a building dedicated to serving visitors to Newport whilst also housing a number of important community services too. If successful, this approach could secure the long-term future of the building whilst reducing the current operating costs for a number of local organisations including PCNPA.

There are number of options to support the community in acquiring and managing the Newport Visitor Centre including the potential for community asset transfer. It is too early at this stage to suggest that this might be the preferred option but Appendix 1 highlights the kind of questions that PCNPA and the local community will need to answer to build a robust business case for acquisition whether through community asset transfer or not.

As Appendix 1 highlights, developing a business case will take time and it is proposed to give the Town Council and the local community at least six months to develop a workable long-term solution. To facilitate this it is proposed to keep the Newport Visitor Centre open until the end of October 2017.

Risk considerations

It looks likely that the Authority will have a 'budget freeze' (i.e. no increase or decrease) for the 2017/18 financial year (although confirmation has not yet been received from the Welsh Government). This potentially provides the Authority with a little 'breathing space' to use the next six months to work closely with community organisations in Newport to explore new ways of delivering visitor services. A potential 'rush' to close the Newport Visitor Centre prior to the 2017 season would be met with considerable community opposition and could have a detrimental impact on PCNPA's community and business relationships locally.

Compliance

The proposed changes to the Authority's visitor services will enhance the ability "*to encourage and support the development of sustainable employment and businesses, particularly in tourism and recreation*" and "*to protect and promote the local culture of language, arts and heritage of the area*" as set out in the Authority's draft 2017/18 Corporate Plan.

In addition, it provides a unique opportunity to explore a new model of service delivery in Newport that might provide a 'template' for new ways of working with the private, public and voluntary sector to deliver other aspects of PCNPA's services in future.

Human Rights/Equality issues

An initial equality impact assessment (EIA) screening analysis suggests that a full EIA is not necessary due to the limited impact on individuals and/or groups with protected characteristics.

Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal

The proposed actions in this paper do not conflict with the National Park Management Plan and/or departmental policies for nature conservation, climate change and resource use. It is envisaged that, by working with the community of Newport on a new model for delivering visitor services we may be able to create a more sustainable approach through improved partnership working.

Welsh Language considerations

The proposals comply with the requirements of the Compliance Notice served upon the Authority under Section 44 of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

Recommendations

Members are asked to approve the following:

To extend the period of community engagement regarding potential changes to the future provision of visitor services in Newport until October 2017.

To keep the Newport Visitor Centre open for the entirety of the 2017 season with no changes to the present levels of service and/or opening hours.

Background Documents

- Report to the National Park Authority to close Tenby Visitor Centre and to extend the period of community engagement regarding Newport Visitor Centre (Report No. 66/16)
- Report to National Park Authority regarding proposed changes to visitor services in Tenby and Newport – 28th September 2016 (Report No. 52/16)
- Various Reports presented to the Provision of Information to Visitors Task and Finish Group – 11th November 2015 – Present
- Report to National Park Authority regarding creation of Task and Finish Group to look at the Future Provision of Information to Visitors - 6 May 2015 (Report No. 24/15)
- Report to Recreation and Tourism Review Committee – Review of Tourism and Destination Management in Pembrokeshire – 28th January 2015 (Report No. 04/15)
- Report to National Park Authority – Overview of Community Consultation Activities – 17th December 2014 (Report No. 71/14)
- Report to Recreation and Tourism Review Committee – Overview of Service Performance from April 2012 – Mar 2013 – 13th November 2013 (Report No. 10/13)
- Report to Recreation and Tourism Review Committee regarding Newport Visitor Centre - 13 March 2013 (Report No. 04/13)

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Community Asset Transfer checklist

The key issues or questions you should ask yourself before, during and after you have acquired land or a facility through asset transfer.

The most successful asset transfers are those that are based on a robust needs analysis, full business plan and a collaborative and effective partnership between the public body and the community-based organisation.

Before you contemplate a community asset transfer, you should consider some fundamental issues. These issues are set out in the checklist to represent each important stage of the transfer process.

The following checklist is not exhaustive but should provide a guide to the most important factors to consider for anyone contemplating asset transfer in a sport or leisure context.	Tick 	
	Yes	Requires Attention
Organise		
Has an appropriate community group been established, fully involving local people?		
Is the purpose of the asset transfer clearly defined and shared by all involved?		
Are stakeholders able to communicate succinctly the benefits of the project to potential funders and investors?		
Do Board members and others involved fully understand the implications of incorporation and establishing limited liability for the transfer?		
Has the group obtained advice on suitable legal vehicles to meet its current and future needs?		
Are the governance arrangements of the community organisation fit for purpose?		
Does the community organisation have all the skills and experience available to carry out the transfer?		

Are there enough volunteers on board to help the community organisation become a strong and well-governed body or is it overly reliant on just a few individuals?		
Plan		
Has the group made use of the support and advice provided by the Wales Co-op Centre when developing its business plan?		
Does a needs analysis show that there is the demand for the facility?		
Has a similar community facility been visited to compare use and demand assumptions?		
Have all of the costs associated with managing the asset been identified to include in revenue projections?		
Have all the costs associated with managing the facility been estimated based on whole life costing?		
Can the asset be secured on the right terms and conditions?		
Will the price agreed take into account any liabilities, including the cost of necessary repairs and future maintenance?		
Has a thorough site appraisal been carried out, with reference to suitable external advisors?		
Are there any site constraints that mean the vision is fatally compromised?		
Have allowances in the financial projections for the repairs and renewals been based on a whole life costing assessment of the asset?		
Are future revenue projections realistic – are they based upon previous years or do they represent a significant step change. If so, are stakeholders satisfied that these projected figures can be achieved?		
Are all stakeholders satisfied that costs and income have been projected in enough detail?		
Have all hiring / rental levels been set to cover all costs and make a surplus?		
Have all the taxation issues been considered in relation to the acquisition of the asset and any effects on future revenue generation been taken into account?		

Do Board members and the group as a whole understand all the figures for the project and the assumptions on which they are based?		
Liaise		
Has there been adequate consultation between the local authority and communities regarding the possible transfer of community facilities?		
Has a realistic provisional timescale for transfer been set?		
Has the local authority investigated the implications of TUPE and shared them with the group?		
Are people prepared for the long period of time that some asset transfer projects need?		
Has the time needed to raise funding been built in to the timetable for transfer?		
Has the local authority co-opted a cross-section of key departments to support the transfer process?		
Is there someone in the local authority with responsibility for ensuring the best outcome for both sides; who will 'own' the project for the long haul?		
Is there a clear process for how transfers are to be handled in the local authority, (including a practical method for taking account of the benefits that community ownership might bring), with a timescale for a staged decision-making process?		
Is there some form of 'expectations document' setting out the responsibilities of both parties, support offered and dispute resolution options?		
If the asset is to be leased, will there be constraints on the use of the asset that will prevent it being used flexibly in the future?		
<p>If the asset is to be leased for the long term, what are the implications of the management / ownership agreement associated with the transfer? For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the repair and maintenance obligations going to be too onerous and costly? • Are requirements of the lease in relation to sub-letting sufficiently 		

flexible?		
Fund		
Does the group have an agreed fundraising strategy?		
Are all stakeholders satisfied that any capital costs required can be secured?		
Have pre-application discussions taken place with potential funders and does the group believe that the necessary capital can be secured?		
Do the revenue projections in the business plan cover annual running costs, maintenance and contingency?		
Manage		
Has the community group got a financial management system in place to support its current and future business needs?		
Are good financial management practices and procedures agreed, or in place?		
Has the community group prioritised Health and Safety and designated someone to be responsible for ensuring that statutory requirements are met?		
Has the community group considered all of the potential security risks associated with managing the sports facility and how they will be mitigated?		
Is the facility easy to secure?		
Is it possible to limit access to parts of the building / site if necessary, or to close off when not in use?		
Have all of the tasks associated with maintaining and managing the facility been allocated to staff, (or contractors), with relevant skills and experience?		

<p>If the community group is not employing property management personnel, has it considered how its volunteers will cover all of the necessary responsibilities of facilities management?</p>		
<p>Has the community group considered all of the options to maximise volunteer input, to complement any paid staff resource?</p>		
<p>Are steps being taken to build capacity within the community group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • by investing in training, • leveraging the skills of an external mentor or, • setting up a small 'task and finish' groups to take on specific responsibilities like fund-raising? 		