

REPORT OF COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING MANAGER

SUBJECT: COVID-19: COMMUNICATIONS RECOVERY PLANNING

Purpose of Report

To provide Members with an update on progress and success to date of the *Communicating out of Covid:19 Recovery Plan* (see Appendix A).

Introduction

In March of this year, as the impact of COVID:19 extended its reach across the country, the Park Authority faced the biggest challenge since the Sea Empress Disaster (1996) and the outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease (2001). Our access as a nation to free movement had been restricted and life as we knew it became a very different concept. In direct response to the operational challenge of responding to the pandemic, the Authority set up an Emergency Response Team (ERT). The purpose of the group was to provide a co-ordinated response to Government advice, provide strong leadership and clear communications to staff and mitigate where possible the effects on the Authority's financial and people resources.

Internal

Advising on and delivering clear messaging to staff throughout the early months of the crisis was a critical part of our communications response, keeping staff engaged and informed as we responded to the full impact of the pandemic.

External

In responding to the crisis, we wanted to provide a clear focus and strategic vision to shape our external communications. Underpinning our approach was the need for us to communicate clearly and consistently, often responding at the height of the crisis to factors outside of the Authority's control. We developed a plan that has allowed us to react and respond as necessary and to reassure our audiences, especially local communities, that their safety is our priority.

Principles of crisis communications

Communicating in any crisis requires proactive, quick and detailed communication. In the early stages of the pandemic, this approach served us well in engaging with key audiences – internally and externally. Due to the sustained nature of the crisis surrounding COVID:19, it was important to develop a strategy that would respond to the immediate situation and provide a clear structure and work programme for the Communications team and wider Authority staff. Throughout the pandemic we have endeavoured to follow the key principles of crisis communications, reflecting empathy and transparency while being aware of the context and developing a series of actions to best engage and respond to concerns.

We have ensured that our messages are both clear and easy for people to engage with, as well as supporting the principles we have promoted, particularly in terms of feeling positive about protecting 'our Park'.

Reconnecting with nature

As the crisis unfolded, it quickly became apparent that we had a powerful role to play in reconnecting people with nature – physically, mentally and virtually. Never before had National Parks represented such beacons of wellbeing, and never before had we had such an opportunity to reach out to a more diverse and receptive audience. As people began exploring outdoors again, it became clear that they were using National Parks across the UK to connect with nature, with themselves and with each other.

Through the Recovery Plan, we wanted to embrace this powerful connection with nature and encourage people to enjoy Wales' natural landscapes safely, responsibly and ultimately, more sustainably.

The power of partnerships

This is a crisis that has spared no one. Yet it is a crisis that has been overwhelmingly positive in developing new and extremely productive partnerships and ways of working with key partners, including Welsh Government, Visit Wales, Welsh National Park Authorities, Pembrokeshire County Council and countryside agencies across Wales. Regular meetings, shared messaging, and a consistent and unified 'voice' across traditional and social media has given us a powerful approach to developing our collective communications in this crisis.

We as communicators were at the very heart of the decisions being communicated by Welsh Government and were fundamental to supporting the main messages and guidance being implemented. We continue to play an active role in working with the First Minister's Communications Department and Visit Wales to develop a consistent response to the latest firebreak legislation.

Due to the success and strength of the Recovery Plan and associated delivery, we have also secured the in-kind support of two national PR agencies, both keen to embrace the Plan's positive vision for a more engaged and sustainable visitor post-Covid:19. Assistance has already been provided with media engagement and we are currently working on a campaign for next season using key influencers to support our messaging and promote the key themes of sustainable tourism and 'wildhood', engaging with families to explore and enjoy the very best of our National Park, safely.

Reach and impact

The reach of our activity was unprecedented and far exceeded all of our anticipated engagement targets. The ['Nature's Recovery' films](#) perfectly captured the mood and sentiment of a nation yearning for greater access to our iconic landscapes and fully receptive to our 'Tread Lightly' messaging. The films were viewed nearly 500k times and engaged with over 600k people across our social channels in the first weekend of airing, connecting with audiences around the world. The films proved so successful that the format and messaging was replicated almost entirely by the Welsh Government and National Parks UK in subsequent films that they produced.

Following months of issues surrounding anti-social behaviour across all UK National Parks, we took the innovative approach of working with actor Steffan Rhodri, best known for his role as Dave Coaches on the hit BBC comedy series *Gavin and Stacey*, to engage with what had proven to be an incredibly hard to reach non-traditional audience. Using our social media channels, we recorded and issued a special message from Steffan, encouraging people to use designated campsites when visiting the National Park and to respect the area.

The video reached over half a million people (650k) and generated over a quarter of a million views over the first four days of being posted. It has been recognised by Welsh Government, Visit Wales and protected landscape partners across the UK as an enlightened way of engaging with a previously difficult to reach audience, and has provided an excellent example of the benefits of using influencers to engage with public sector messaging at minimal cost.

It is hoped that the films will support a step-change in attitudes and sustainable visitor behaviour and they provided a fantastic platform for delivering the Communications Recovery Plan.

Linked to the Recovery Plan and the drive to engage directly with our audiences on social media throughout the pandemic, we have monitored a significant increase in followers across our main channels. We have recorded a 15% increase in followers across Facebook and Twitter during the past seven months. This reflects national data compiled by Ofcom¹ highlighting the influential role that social media has played as a source of information in the UK during the pandemic.

We also launched the Authority's new website in April, marking a significant improvement in functionality and accessibility and providing users with enhanced information on the National Park. Critically, we were also able to provide up-to-date information on changes to Authority services and accessing the Park during the crisis.

Our reach via traditional media has seen notable increases over the past seven months, linked particularly to national collaborations on joint media statements and releases. Media monitoring highlights include peaks of potential engagement with over 250 million people on specific days.

The plan and associated social media coverage acted as a springboard for accessing major TV and radio networks to ensure that PCNPA messages were broadcast to the widest audience possible at the height of the crisis.

Recovery Plan Feedback

The Plan was shared with key UK and Welsh partners, tourism trade representatives and Local Authorities across Wales. Feedback was incredibly positive, and included comments such as:

¹ Ofcom Communications Market Report 2020

Head of Marketing, Visit Wales: *“The Recovery Plan and close working relationship has been invaluable in supporting national Government messaging in response to the COVID:19 crisis. It has given clarity of approach, has delivered exceptional results and engagement, and the principle of developing a more sustainable approach to tourism as a result of the pandemic is hugely positive. Incorporating the creatives and ethos of the superb National Park branding, the plan and associated campaigns have proved to be hugely successful.”*

Chair, Wales Tourism Alliance: *“Simply love the quality of presentation. Really top class, reinforcing the PCNP brand so well.”*

Chair, South West Regional Tourism Partnership: *“What a positive, uplifting and encouraging document, with foresighted, sustainable messages that will place Pembrokeshire in good stead for the foreseeable COVID-secure future.”*

Chair, Pembrokeshire Tourism: *“Fantastic piece of work. I think it’s key that visitors know what is expected of them, that businesses have guidelines, and it’s important that visitors have some too. Communication is going to play a huge part in winning hearts and minds of the local community.”*

Pembrokeshire accommodation provider: *“It made me feel proud to live in Pembrokeshire and quite protective too of what we have here, how to protect it but also how to share it, responsibly.”*

Challenges

With increased visitor numbers inevitably comes increased visitor management issues, and this summer was no exception. Anti-social behaviour across the UK’s protected landscapes was widespread and proved extremely challenging to combat, with many issues arising from new and previously unengaged audiences, many with little countryside awareness. Working collaboratively with partners in Wales, we used our key ‘respect’ messaging to provide clear and consistent communications and engage with traditional and new audiences to address these issues. Critical to our approach was securing the trust and confidence of our local communities and engaging with them directly to support our messaging.

Park Authority staff embraced the messaging with our Ranger Team producing [their own film](#) to encourage visitors to respect the Park and follow the Countryside Code.

Site-based communication was reinforced with social media awareness-raising and allowed us to work with high-profile influencers to improve the reach of our messaging and translate this into more responsible behaviour on the ground. The Recovery Plan gave outdoor staff consistent messaging and a clear focus in challenging the anti-social behaviour over the critical summer months.

We successfully managed to strike the delicate balance of being the voice of the ‘custodians of the countryside’ while promoting Pembrokeshire’s piece of paradise, in the right way, at the right time.

Financial considerations

The Plan was developed in-house by the Communications & Marketing Manager and has been delivered at minimal cost using social media and field communications as the primary tools of engagement. It has provided a platform to review our approach to future communications and engagement, using newer technology and more contemporary methods of reaching our audiences.

Risk considerations

When the communication relating to any crisis is well managed, risks are minimised. The Recovery Plan has been a critical element in the Authority's response to the pandemic, delivering key activities and messaging that has supported public safety, raised awareness of the importance of the Park to the nation's wellbeing, and developed highly effective campaigns to encourage greater respect for our protected landscapes.

Human Rights/Equality issues

The pandemic has reinforced the notion that we are all part of an interlinked society and that our actions can have a powerful impact on each other and can affect the communities that we are part of. Through the Recovery Plan, we have adopted a range of communications channels to ensure we are engaging with the broadest cross-section of society, aiming to be as inclusive as possible. We have worked to empower our audiences to make the right decisions at the right time to keep themselves and others safe, while still enjoying the National Park and helping to secure its long-term, sustainable future.

Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal

The ultimate aim of the Recovery Plan is to work towards developing sustainable, responsible tourism and encouraging a greater awareness and appreciation of the National Park. Promoting biodiversity and the Authority's success in this area is fundamental to achieving this goal. We have secured the support of Iolo Williams to champion the importance of biodiversity in our National Park and we will be producing a film promoting our biodiversity success stories over the coming months.

Welsh Language statement

All communications activity linked to the Recovery Plan has followed the Authority's Welsh Language policy.

Conclusion

Over the past seven months we have been reminded that we have the power to make a difference to each other, to local nature and to our wider environment on many different levels. Through the Recovery Plan we have embraced that sense of power and impact and will continue to do so as the crisis develops.

In a time of extreme uncertainty, the report was designed to give assurance, focus and consistency to all of our external communications. It has also given staff clarity – both in terms of the direction of our communications crisis response and our key messaging. Most importantly, it has given staff, our communities and our partners a sense of hope that in the midst of a global crisis, we as an Authority can harness some positivity from the pandemic in how our audiences engage with and appreciate our protected landscapes.

Recommendation: Members are asked to NOTE this report.

(Further information is available from Marie Edwards, Communications & Marketing Manager, on 01646 624824 or email: mariee@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk).

COMMUNICATING OUT OF COVID:19



Parc Cenedlaethol
Arfordir Penfro

A NEW DAWN

For the first time in the history of National Parks, our access to free movement has been restricted, and life as we know it has become a very different concept.

Lockdown restrictions have limited how and when we can leave home, who we can interact with and where we can see them. For millions of residents across the UK, access to green spaces and the outdoors has been severely limited. Even for those fortunate enough to live in rural areas, access to the outdoors has been localised at best.

Tourism as we know it has come to a resounding halt, meaning visitors to National Parks, including ours, have had to delay plans to visit, indefinitely.

Not only will we need to support and embrace visitors again when the time is right, but we'll also need to reassure rural communities who are naturally nervous about what 'reopening' to visitors will mean for them.

We have a role to play in helping to prevent conflict between people who live and work in the National Park, and those who want to visit.

As restrictions ease we'll work together with partners to make reopening safe for those who live, work and visit the National Park.



How we communicate with people who will want to visit, and those who live and work in the National Park, has the power to make a difference.

At the heart of what we need to say to people is that this pandemic has reminded us that we are all part of an interlinked society...

...where what we (as individuals) do can have an incredibly powerful impact on each other and on local nature

...either positively or negatively.



We've all been reminded that...

The choices we make

The way we behave towards others

How we demonstrate what matters to us

...all affect the communities that we are a part of.

We've been reminded that we have the power to make a difference to each other, to local nature and to the wider planet on many different levels.

We want to embrace that sense of power and impact...

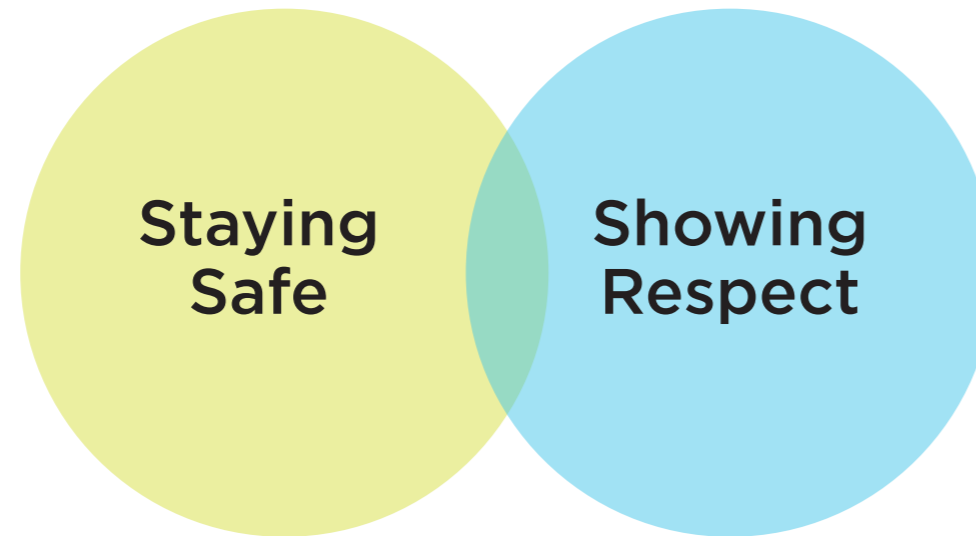


...because ultimately how people behave as we move out of lockdown, will influence how successful we are at moving closer to recovery, safely.

WHAT WE'LL SAY

Underpinning all of this is the need for us to communicate clearly and concisely. As an organisation, we've had to react quickly in recent months to changing external situations, often responding in the best way we can to factors outside of our control. So we need to be prepared to change and adapt what we say and how we say it in the months ahead, to react and respond as necessary and reassure those people looking to us to keep them, and the National Park, safe.

We'll build on two familiar concepts initially that matter now more than ever:



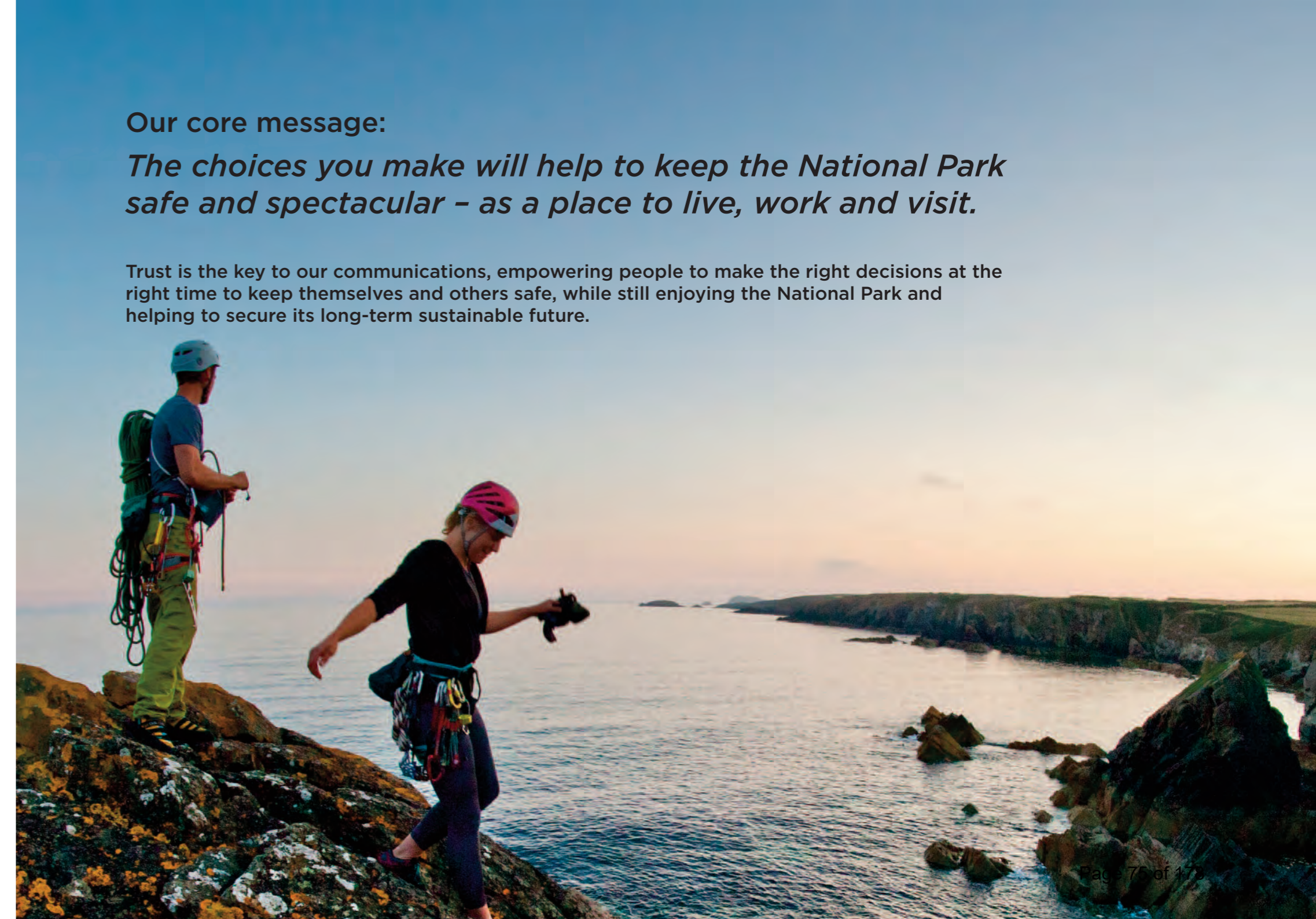
Our message needs to:

- be clear
- make it easy for people to do their bit
- ...and feel good about it.*

Our core message:

The choices you make will help to keep the National Park safe and spectacular – as a place to live, work and visit.

Trust is the key to our communications, empowering people to make the right decisions at the right time to keep themselves and others safe, while still enjoying the National Park and helping to secure its long-term sustainable future.



HOW WE'LL SAY IT

Authenticity.

We are a National Park shaped by nature. It has nurtured our people, our history, our culture and our visitors. We care deeply for conservation, community, culture, and our coast and we want to lead the world in protecting them. But in this new world, our future is dependent on all of us working together.

Openness.

We believe everyone has the right to enjoy our unspoilt, bold, beautiful, nature and culture rich National Park, something we've conserved and enhanced for nearly 70 years. People want to trust in us to make access to the outdoors safe and we need to trust in them to do the right thing to stay safe too.

We are outward looking, open to new ideas and opportunities that help our communities and strengthen our coastal National Park.

We'll strike a balance between being the voice of 'custodians' of the countryside; and promoting our piece of Pembrokeshire's paradise, in the right way, at the right time.

Sustainability.

We know people have missed being outside, so we have a role to play in re-connecting them with nature - physically, mentally and virtually. We want to encourage people to enjoy Wales' natural landscapes, but safely, responsibly and ultimately, more sustainably.

Not since their designation has the spotlight shined so brightly on National Parks as beacons of well-being. And never before have we had such an opportunity to reach out to a more diverse, receptive and 'hungry' audience.

A nation has learnt that nature is powerful, nature can heal and nature can provide for their needs in a way many people never dreamed possible. People are using our National Parks to reconnect - with nature, with themselves and with each other.

Let's not lose this chance to make this moment matter - for us and for future generations.



WHAT WILL WE DO?

We'll respond to the latest Government guidance to inform the changes we make on the ground locally and the messages we send out to our audiences in that moment.

We'll shape what we say around the feedback we're getting - from partners, communities and our customers and how people around the Park, and Pembrokeshire, respond to the changes.

Nationally we're linked in with a number of outdoor and cultural agencies to co-ordinate our approach, align our messaging and support a stronger collective voice. We're working together, stronger, with Visit Wales, Natural Resources Wales, National Trust, Cadw and protected landscapes across Wales to craft our Communications.

As we navigate our way through the early stages of lockdown release, we're learning from shared impacts and experiences across all agencies. And we'll pool resources to develop shared assets and a national approach to what's needed in the moment - from visitor insights to behaviour change campaigns and customer charters.

And when the time is right for Welsh Government to fully unlock Wales, we'll work directly with Visit Wales, and other partners, to roll-out our landmark campaign, *The Coast is Clear. Visit Pembrokeshire Coast National Park.*



WHAT CAN I DO?

Feed us as much content as you can so that we can share your passion, your expertise and your love for the Park with those audiences who have been starved of access to nature and the outdoors for so long.

Be our 'eyes and ears' - in the field and online. Share your insights to help us craft the communications and messages that will have the most impact at the right time.

Keep us informed - of any communications material you need - anything that goes out to the public gives us a chance to communicate a message, engage in another way, and sow the seed for change by centrally co-ordinating our communications.

And finally, go out there and do what you do, know and love best - working together to support the Authority in keeping our National Park, our county and our communities, a safe and welcoming place, when the time is right.

Share your insights to help us craft the communications...



WHAT WILL IT LOOK LIKE?

We'll follow the Welsh Government's traffic light system through the various phases out of lockdown and run a series of campaigns and targeted messaging, with the #KeepPembSafe sign off throughout, echoing the Welsh Government's #KeepWalesSafe national branding.

Each phase has its own story, its own voice, and its own distinct 'call to action'. But to be successful and have impact, we need the core messaging at each phase to run through all of our external communications - from signage to social. No matter how small a piece of comms it seems, it will be significant. And being consistent is key.

React → Reassure → Inspire → Return → Renew



React

We'll be 'Reacting' immediately, with a proactive anti-social behaviour campaign, addressing many of the unfortunate issues experienced in English National Parks as restrictions eased and more people reclaimed the outdoors. We'll lead on social, with targeted posts to people living within five miles of our National Park, aligning with travel restrictions set out in Welsh Government guidelines. We'll also capitalise on media interest and support, built through investing time in developing strong media relationships in recent months. Snowdonia and Brecon Beacons will be running in parallel with similar messaging, along with outdoor partners across Wales.

We'll educate...

A little space goes a long way

2m

6 Chough

2m

2 Welsh Mountain ewes

2m

1 VW Camper

2m

Observe the 2 metre rule

Accessible green spaces like National Parks can be great places to exercise while social distancing, when done safely and with care.

RESPECT THE LAND
RESPECT THE COMMUNITY
RESPECT EACH OTHER

We'll inform...

A little space goes a long way

Accessible green spaces like National Parks can be great places to exercise while social distancing, when done safely and with care.

RESPECT THE LAND
Follow the Countryside Code

RESPECT THE COMMUNITY
Keep a safe distance from homes and farms

RESPECT EACH OTHER
Keep dogs on leads

STAY SAFE
Sanitise hands regularly, especially around gates and stiles

2m

RESPECT THE LAND
RESPECT THE COMMUNITY
RESPECT EACH OTHER

We'll advise...

RESPECT THE LAND

No fires or barbecues

Take your rubbish home

No wild camping

Keep dogs on leads

RESPECT THE LAND
RESPECT THE COMMUNITY
RESPECT EACH OTHER

And we'll raise a smile (because, right now, we all need one)...

All public toilets are currently closed.

Plan ahead for nature's calls and avoid having to 'pay the call' in our National Park.

Take a tinkle in your toilet before leaving home!

RESPECT THE LAND
RESPECT THE COMMUNITY
RESPECT EACH OTHER

Reassure

By investing time in preventing anti-social behaviour, we'll give assurance to our resident communities when we move into the 'Reassure' phase, that they matter, and we'll retain this emphasis throughout our communications in this phase. And providing the public work with us in doing the right thing as we cross phases, we'll move to a 'Tread Lightly' message, giving scope to weave in 'for now and for ever' as the defining factor in the impact of people's behaviour as they access the Park.

Here we'll move from the immediate impacts of people starved of access to the outdoors desperately getting their much-needed nature 'fix', to creating a sense of ownership of our outdoor space, where people feel invested in caring for the very thing (nature; our National Park) that they craved access to at the peak of the Covid-19 crisis.

We don't just want to preach, we want to change hearts, minds and most importantly, work towards a shift-change in long-term behaviour.

We'll use the power of imagery - from photography to film - to engage, and reflect on the time we were 'away' from the Park en masse, where nature reclaimed the Park and our outdoor spaces had more room to 'breathe'.



Inspire

We'll start telling the stories of the things that make our coastline great. Our history, landscape, communities and culture - we'll let them shine through and they'll speak for themselves. We'll engage with our audiences, near and far, to share their stories and we'll build on the sense of belonging and ownership we nurtured in the previous phase.

We'll use these stories to inspire and ignite people's imagination as to the endless possibilities for adventure in our National Park, when the time is right.

Return

We'll have weathered the storm and we can open our arms to visitors in Wales and shout from the clifftops that the welcome is warm. We'll roll out our landmark campaign - *The Coast is Clear. Visit Pembrokeshire Coast National Park*, to visitors old and new, to the media, online influencers and anyone interested in sharing our story. And we'll work with Visit Wales, Pembrokeshire's emerging Destination Management Organisation (DMO) and private sector partners to support our main messaging.

PEMBROKESHIRE
WONDER
FILLED
COAST



Renew

A new National Park audience (and Pembrokeshire visitor) is 'born' - better engaged, better informed and more committed than ever to securing a sustainable future for our Park and future generations. We'll come full circle and use this phase as the platform for future communications, and messaging, to remind people of the passion they felt during the peak of the crisis when access to the outdoors was limited and how, for many, nature was, and is, vital to their well-being.

And we'll be the voice of nature's guardian again, warm and welcoming but ever-present, as a reminder to people of the powerful role they play in helping to protect our piece of paradise for future generations.



HOW WILL WE STAY ON TRACK?

We'll be measuring the success of our communications (and a whole lot more behind the scenes) to gauge what's working, or isn't. We'll be watching out for social sentiment – the general online 'mood' to track our progress, we'll listen to our local communities, our partners, and we'll be relying on you, our eyes and ears around the Park, to support us.

Crucially, we won't be afraid to change approach if the external situation takes us in a different direction or we need to adapt messaging to match the moment. Becoming entrenched will be our enemy in communicating our way out of this crisis.

Who can tell me more?

For further insight chat to Marie Edwards, Communications and Marketing Manager, 07791 967390 or email mariee@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk.



Parc Cenedlaethol
Arfordir Penfro

Pembrokeshire Coast
National Park