

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF COUNTRYSIDE, COMMUNITY AND VISITOR SERVICES**

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**SUBJECT: ANCIENT CONNECTIONS AND CELTIC ROUTES – PHASE 2 FUNDING**

Purpose of Report

Members are asked to endorse PCNPA's contributions to Phase 2 of the EU funded Ancient Connections and Celtic Routes initiatives.

Introduction/Background

The Park Authority has been a partner in the above EU funded initiatives since their inception. Both projects support collaborative working across West Wales and the East of Ireland in order to strengthen the local and regional visitor economy in both countries.

WEFO provided an opportunity to extend both initiatives until Sept 2023 and has agreed formal 'Phase 2' support based on the 'in-principle' commitment of funding from those agencies involved, including PCNPA, as outlined in the associated bid documentation.

Ancient Connections

Ancient Connections is a cross-border tourism development project linking North Pembrokeshire and North Wexford and has been designed to deliver Specific Objective 3 of the Ireland Wales Cross-Border Co-operation Programme 2017-20, i.e. *"To sustainably realise the potential of natural and cultural assets in increasing visitor numbers to coastal communities in the Programme area."*

The project has been led by Pembrokeshire County Council since April 2019, with joint beneficiaries Wexford County Council, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority and Visit Wexford. These project partners are committed to ongoing support for a formal Phase 2 project which will run from the end of the current project (June 2022) for an additional 15 months until September 2023.

Celtic Routes

Celtic Routes is a branded collection of tourism experiences that encourages travellers to South East Ireland and West Wales by offering a number of immersive and authentic cultural heritage experiences. The project is led by Carmarthenshire County Council and also involves Ceredigion County Council, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority, Wicklow, Wexford and Waterford County Councils in Ireland too.

Phase 1 of the project has laid the foundations for a successful and innovative tourism initiative which has made significant ground to date. A strong Celtic Routes brand and associated collateral has been developed which has gained a high profile

through the Partnership’s on-going marketing campaigns. It is hoped that extending the project, through a formal second phase, will help boost the visitor economy over the next 2-3 years.

The partnership has received Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) approval for Phase 2 which will extend the current project until the end of May 2023.

**Financial considerations**

The Park Authority’s proposed contributions to both EU funded initiatives is detailed in Appendix A and summarised below. This is the final tranche of EU funding available to Wales which has been made available until the associated programmes (i.e. European Territorial Co-operation programmes) end in December 2023.

PCNPA Contribution	Total (Euros)
Staff Time (AC)	17,550
Cash (AC)	40,950
Staff Time (CR)	38,066
Cash (CR)	25,286
Total Contribution	€121,852

\*AC = Ancient Connections / CR = Celtic Routes

The sums involved (Appendix A) are relatively modest when compared to the significant investment that both initiatives will bring to the visitor economy in Pembrokeshire – especially during such a tough operating context due to COVID-19.

It is, however, difficult to be definitive on what revenue will be available to PCNPA in 2022/23 to meet the Authority’s match requirements due to the uncertainty in future revenue availability/austerity/COVID 19 legacy pressures. As a result, PCNPA’s commitment to both initiatives is not ‘risk free’.

**Risk considerations**

An ‘unpredictable’ budget forecast for 2022/23 could, if revenue drops significantly, impact on PCNPA’s ability to meet our match-funding commitments to both Ancient Connections and Celtic Routes

Similarly, in-kind contributions of PCNPA staff time across a variety of partnership initiatives (e.g. Ancient Connections, Celtic Routes, Wales Coast Path, Visit Pembrokeshire DMO, Pembrokeshire Inspired, etc) place additional pressures on a small cohort of key staff who are already stretched due to the impact of COVID-19 on existing workloads.

**Recommendation**

It is recommended that Members agree PCNPA’s contributions to both the Ancient Connections and Celtic Routes initiatives (see Appendix A) in order to further enhance the value and economic impact of tourism in Pembrokeshire.

**Background Documents**

Report 08/17 Wales – Ireland Interreg Bid (Celtic Trails) 2017 – 2019, National Park Authority, 01/02/17

Update on Celtic Routes, Operational Review Committee, 17/06/20

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Appendix A

Ancient Connections – Phase 2 Budget (Euros)

<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>1,481,400.00</b>	<b>1,481,400.00</b>
<b>Match Total</b>	<b>296,280.00</b>	
<b>ERDF</b>	<b>1,185,120.00</b>	

<b>Match Funding:</b>		
<u>Staff Match; Wexford CC</u>		<u>50,140.00</u>
<u>Volunteers; Wexford CC</u>		<u>28,000.00</u>
<u>Cash; Wexford CC</u>		<u>50,000.00</u>
<u>Cash; Visit Wexford</u>		<u>20,000.00</u>
	<b>Ireland Match</b>	<b>148,140.00</b>
<u>Staff Match; PCNPA</u>		<u>17,550.00</u>
<u>Cash; PCNPA</u>		<u>40,950.00</u>
<u>Staff Match; Pembs CC</u>		<u>26,205.00</u>
<u>Volunteers; Pembs CC</u>		<u>28,000.00</u>
<u>Cash; Pembs CC</u>		<u>35,435.00</u>
	<b>Wales Match</b>	<b>148,140.00</b>
	<b>Total Match</b>	<b>296,280.00</b>

Celtic Routes – Phase 2 Budget (Euros)

The total project cost for Phase 2 will be €1,917,771 with grant funding from the Ireland Wales programme of €1,534,210.

A 20% match funding contribution is required from the project partners. For PCNPA this will be in the form of:

Staff match funding to the value of €38,066 which is equal to £32,535 sterling (exchange rate 1.17)

Cash match funding of €25,286 which is equal to £21,611 (exchange rate 1.17)