

REPORT OF RANGER SERVICE MANAGER

SUBJECT: PARTNERSHIP WORK IN RELATION TO RECREATION MANAGEMENT, WITH A FOCUS ON WORK AT CASTLEMARTIN

Purpose of Report

1. To provide Members with an update on the Castlemartin Ranger partnership, managed by the Authority and part-funded by the Ministry of Defence's Conservation Stewardship Fund and a Joint Working Partnership with Natural Resources Wales.

Introduction

2. The military training estate within the National Park extends to around 2,500ha and consists of Castlemartin Range, Penally Gallery Rifle Range and Manorbier Air Defence Range. Almost all the land lies within designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest with the Castlemartin coastline additionally protected as a Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area for its limestone features and breeding chough and seabird populations. The Ranges also contain a number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments and other sites of archaeological/historic importance.
3. The Pembrokeshire Ranges contribute a major role in military training in the UK and are valued for the range of training opportunities they present from direct gunnery from Armoured Fighting Vehicles (tanks) to all arms live fire tactical exercises involving aircraft, vehicles and ground troops. The cone shaped sea danger areas extending out from Castlemartin and Manorbier ranges enable them to accommodate large and mobile weapons systems which cannot be used at other landlocked training areas.
4. The Ranges are highly valued for recreation and are a popular destination for walkers, bird watchers and rock climbers and it is this popularity which led to the Authority's involvement and partnership to support management of recreation, particularly climbing in this sensitive area.
5. Public access is limited to the Coastal strip of Castlemartin Range East and Penally Range. There is no public access at Manorbier Range or Castlemartin Range West, however over the years the National Park Authority has helped to negotiate and secure some guided or briefed access to these areas for people who wish to visit them.

Background to the Partnership

6. The limestone coast of Pembrokeshire at Castlemartin and Stackpole represents some of the finest sea cliff climbing in the UK and is highly valued by local and visiting climbers for the range and quality of climbing routes available. Cliff climbing grew steadily in popularity from its beginnings in

Pembrokeshire in the 1960s and has recently enjoyed another surge in popularity with increasingly greater numbers of women taking part. The 2016 Visit Wales 'Year of Adventure' campaign has helped to fuel this recent popularity of climbing along with other adventure sports.

7. During the 1970s and 80s climbing was frowned upon by the MOD and public access to the Ranges was limited as the MOD Byelaws restricted access to the Coast Path route only. As climbing grew in popularity the lack of access caused frustration and many incidents of trespass into the Ranges by climbers seeking to explore new opportunities. Unregulated access to the cliffs gave rise to concern from nature conservation bodies that climbing activity was disturbing breeding bird populations reliant on ledges and crevices in the cliffs. Some species, such as the chough, already marginal in Pembrokeshire and threatened in the UK, were considered particularly vulnerable. There were perceptions that nature conservation was used as an excuse to keep the public out of the Ranges and that climbers were rule breakers who would not stick to access agreements.
8. Resolving this conflict between recreation, nature conservation and the landowner's primary business of military training was considered essential by the National Park Authority. Since the 1970s we have worked in partnership with the MOD, the National Trust who own the adjacent Stackpole Estate, CCW / NRW and other organisations through various partnership arrangements to carefully broker access arrangements that meet Park Purposes and the Sandford principle: to ensure that, when conflicts cannot be reconciled, nature conservation is not compromised by public access.
9. The Castlemartin Ranger post developed from an initial seasonal post funded in the early 1990s by South Pembrokeshire District Council, Countryside Commission and PCNP and later from a joint post funded with NT and covering Stackpole. The more permanent arrangement came from the production of a joint Integrated Land Management Plan produced for each of the ranges around 2002 and resulted in a post with a much wider remit. All the partners in the production of the management plan stressed the importance of a coordinating ranger role and over many years of careful conflict resolution the work of the Ranger at Castlemartin has achieved a well-balanced situation of managed voluntary climbing restrictions which are well communicated and understood by the climbing community. Infringements are rare, although do still happen occasionally and regular monitoring is key to their success.

Current funding arrangements

10. The current partnership between the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), the estate management branch of the MOD, Natural Resources Wales and PCNPA has been in place since 2003. The partnership funds the post of the Castlemartin Ranger on a part-time basis with a seasonal assistant covering weekends and bank holidays from Easter to the end of September, along with a vehicle and small materials budget. The total annual cost of the partnership is £34,000, with 50% of the budget provided by the DIO, 25% by NRW and the remaining 25% by PCNPA. The current funding is provided through a three year Joint Working Partnership with NRW which ends in

March 2018 and an annual grant from the DIO's Conservation Stewardship Fund. PCNPA's contribution is from the Authority's core funds.

Outcomes

11. The outcome of the current Joint Working Partnership is that the military ranges in Pembrokeshire are managed in a way that integrates their military function with the high landscape and recreational value and conserves their important conservation features. This is assessed through working with stakeholders, a programme of conservation monitoring and review of the integrated land management plan.
12. There are a number of outcomes and measures identified to meet this aim listed below. Progress against the agreed outputs is reported at a quarterly steering group of the partners and through interim and annual reports.

Output	Measure
Climbing restrictions implemented for all Scheduled nesting bird species within the Castlemartin Cliffs SPA likely to be impacted by recreational disturbance	Number of restrictions in place compared to number of nest sites
Regular liaison meetings with stakeholder groups which achieve consensus, agree access arrangements and prevent misunderstandings or misuse.	Cliff Climbing Liaison meeting. Access and Recreation Meeting Pembrokeshire Ranges Conservation Group
Optimise opportunities for recreational use of Castlemartin Range West	Number of climbers, fishermen, surfers and walkers attending briefings and gaining access.
Agreed species and habitat monitoring programme and co-ordination of volunteer monitoring	All survey data input onto national biological recording systems and trends reported to NRW

Achievements and highlights

13. The significant achievement of the partnership is the implementation of an integrated land management plan for the Ranges, a key requirement of which is the employment of a part time Ranger and seasonal assistant to monitor and manage the special features of the Ranges and safeguard public access. The Rangers' work focuses on ensuring that recreational activity has minimal impact on cliff nesting birds and other notable species through an effective series of agreed seasonal climbing restrictions, management of the public access network and provision of other access opportunities. The Rangers are closely involved in monitoring the conservation features of the scheduled sites on the MoD Ranges, liaising with user groups, both civilian and military, and ensuring that sustainable public access is achieved whenever possible.

14. Notable recent achievements of the role include:
 - a. Facilitated the creation and ongoing management of the Castlemartin Range Trail.

- b. Worked with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust to improve management of meadow areas for bumblebees along with interpretive materials for the public.
- c. Restoration of the historic orchard at Brownslade.
- d. Developed access arrangements for cavers for the first time with an agreed protocol for cave conservation and exploration.
- e. Negotiated year-round access to Castlemartin Range West for climbers.
- f. Worked with the British Mountaineering Council to improve/remove belay stakes from cliff tops.
- g. Provided opportunities for the communities most closely affected by military activity on both Castlemartin and Manorbier Ranges to have guided tours.
- h. Worked with DIO to improve boundary signage and the range boundaries including hedge planting, seating and a wildflower meadow.
- i. Successfully acquired funding to carry out scrub control for both wildlife and public access requirements
- j. Assisted with the production of interpretation panels and the new DIO Public Information Leaflet
- k. Annual monitoring of species including chough, peregrine, green-winged orchid and seal pups
- l. Led educational visits to the Camp and Ranges.

Financial, Risk and Compliance Considerations

15. The current cost of the Ranger post to the Authority is £8,500. This can be expected to increase by a small percentage annually as salaries increase and when the vehicle lease is renewed.

16. There are a number of risks to be considered:

All the three public sector partners are facing budget reductions and if one partner were to reduce or withdraw their contribution there is a risk that the remaining partners would not be able to meet the cost of the post. As the employer, PCNPA would be responsible for any redundancy arrangements that might ensue. Whilst the Partners each have statutory responsibilities with regards to public access and nature conservation no partner is effectively resourced to deliver the whole of the rangers' work which is very much reliant on on-site observation and personal contact and negotiation.

17. The work of the Castlemartin Ranger partnership enables the partners to better comply with their statutory functions; the role contributes significantly to NRW's Business Plan priorities as an innovative approach to the implementation of EU and UK nature conservation legislation and by delivering biodiversity action plan targets such as the Pembrokeshire Chough Species Action Plan, and the Coastal Habitat Action Plan. The role contributes to six of the Authority's seven Well-being Objectives, notably through provision of opportunities for physical activity and mental wellbeing, but also through work to safeguard species and habitats of international significance.

Human Rights/Equality issues

18. No issues have been identified

Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal

19. As explained above, the role makes an important contribution to the management of areas of local and national significance for biodiversity. The Ranger's work directly safeguards scheduled species and helps to guide the DIO's management of the military estate to support the greatest biodiversity benefit.

Welsh Language considerations

The Ranger Team is able to provide a bilingual service.

Conclusion

20. The unique Castlemartin Ranger partnership enables the three partner organisations to balance the potentially conflicting pressures of public access, military use and nature conservation successfully. Funding has been maintained by all the three partner organisations during a period of significant budget cuts which is testament to the value placed on this role.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Members note the contents of this paper and consider a site visit to further explore some of the achievements of the role.

(For further information, please contact Libby Taylor, Ranger Service Manager or Lynne Houlston, Castlemartin Ranger)

Author: Libby Taylor