

OPERATIONAL REVIEW COMMITTEE

1 July 2015

Present: Councillor R Kilmister (Chairman)
Councillor P Harries and Councillor A Wilcox

[Mr AE Sangster arrived during consideration of Report 09/15 Land Management (minute 7 refers), while Ms C Gwyther arrived during the presentation by Coed Cymru (minute 11 refers)]

(Oriol y Parc, St Davids: 10:00am – 12:10pm)

1. Quorum

As the meeting was inquorate it was not possible to proceed with the agenda in the order it was written. Councillor R Kilmister, as former Chairman of the Committee, assumed the Chair and as other Members would arrive later in the meeting, proceeded to take items that did not require a decision.

2. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors ST Hudson, ML Evans and PJ Morgan and Mrs M Thomas.

3. Disclosures of interest

There were no disclosures of interest.

4. Planning: Customer Survey

The Director of Park Direction and Planning explained that the Planning Officers' Society for Wales had sought agreement from all Welsh Planning Authorities to standardise planning customer surveys across Welsh local authorities. The surveys were undertaken by the Data Unit which was funded by Welsh Government. She added that the system in England was currently changing and it was therefore hoped that in the future the same survey could be introduced across the whole country and also widened to include enforcement. However in the meantime two surveys had now been carried out among those who had received planning decisions across local authorities in Wales and the results of the latest survey were reported to Members for information. These showed that the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority had done well when compared to other local authorities, being above the Welsh average in all but one instance. This related to the question "The LPA enforces its planning rules fairly and consistently" and the officer surmised that the response could be the result of the Bettws Newydd case which, although now a long time ago, still weighed heavily in the local consciousness.

Although pleased with the figures and hoping they would be publicised, one Member was surprised that the response was not better given that 98% of the applications had been approved. The Director replied that she



believed some applicants were unhappy at having to submit an application in the first place and others felt that 8 weeks was too long for determination. Consideration would be given to wider publication of the survey results, however they would be included in the Improvement Plan.

[For the resolution on this item please see minute 12]

5. Performance Report for the Period Ending 31 May 2015

The Business and Performance Manager presented the performance for the Park Direction, Delivery and Discovery Teams against the strategic outcomes in the Improvement Plan Part 1 for the first two months of the new financial year using the Ffynnon performance management system. This showed the percentage of work completed, together with the associated RAG (Red-Amber-Green) status for each action. Progress on each these was set out in the report, however at this stage of the year most activities had only recently commenced and some data was not yet available. Routine maintenance work on footpaths and sites was underway and all were on schedule.

The first measure related to sales at Cilrhedyn Woodland Centre, and officers advised that due to the retirement of staff, previous year's sales levels were not expected to be maintained.

In response to a question regarding the Coast Path, officers advised that most cutting work was undertaken by the Authority's own staff, rather than contractors, so that good relationships with landowners could be maintained. Another Member asked about erosion, and was informed that the whole coast path was surveyed every year to assess where work might need to be carried out, however many small sections were re-aligned every year.

Under the work of the Direction Team, one Member asked whether work would be undertaken in the whole of the Gwaun catchment under the INNS Invasive Species project. Officers replied that in theory it was a whole catchment approach, with work starting at the top of the catchment and progressing downwards. However progress would be slow as there were many instances of invasive species to treat, but a good start had been made.

With regard to the review of the Delegation Agreement for Public Rights of Way which had now been completed, officers wished to thank Members for their help in progressing this. Members hoped that there would be greater opportunities for joint working between PCNPA and Pembrokeshire County Council in the future.

The Head of Park Direction reported that the Welsh Government Guidance for the Review of Local Development Plans was still awaited



and she was having a meeting with Welsh Government officers the following week to discuss the likely content and publication date so that work on the Authority's own review could take place. Members were unhappy with the continued delay and asked whether more effective use could be made of Assembly Members to influence Welsh Government officers and press for publication. Officers agreed that greater clarity would assist matters and suggested that a letter could be sent from either the Chair of the Authority or this Committee, however they felt it would be better for an update to be provided to the National Park Authority following the officer meeting, when a final decision could be taken.

Finally, the Business and Performance Manager reported that visitor numbers in the Authority's centres were up slightly on last year with the exception of Oriel y Parc which could be explained by the timing of the opening of the current exhibition.

[For the resolution on this item please see minute 13]

6. Risk Register

The Business and Performance Manager presented the Risk Register to the Committee, as agreed at the meeting of the National Park Authority in June 2015. It was reported that there had been no changes to the levels of risk and no new risks added. He noted that an additional 'comment' column had been added in which any relevant progress was provided.

NOTED.

[Mr AE Sangster arrived during consideration of the following item and the meeting became quorate]

7. Land Management Outcomes Achieved with Landowners in the National Park

The Head of Park Direction presented an overview of the Authority's work with landowners within the National Park and the outcomes being achieved. The Authority's Conservation Land Management Report 2014-15, was also provided, and this detailed the work and outcomes for the financial year just ended.

It was reported that a number of mechanisms were used to promote better conservation and access using a toolkit approach, which meant that, depending on the site circumstances, solutions could be tailored and targeted. These included grant advice and assistance including through the Pembrokeshire Grazing Animals Network and the Pembrokeshire Wildfire Group (heather and grass burning), capital works and site infrastructure, management agreements, practical assistance and invasive non-native species control. Efforts were being made to advertise these services to greater effect on the Authority's website.



Members were reminded that the National Park Authority managed the Pembrokeshire Coast Path National Trail and an extensive network of public rights of way. There was also 5712 ha of designated Access Land in the National Park and a range of permissive access opportunities both on a formal and informal basis. Management of these relied on working with a great many individual landowners, many involved in some form of agriculture or forestry. Staff were therefore in constant engagement with landowners, occupiers and farms as part of their activities in the maintenance and improvement of Public Rights of Way and a good working relationship was therefore essential. Formal liaison also took place through the Pembrokeshire Local Access Forum.

The Delivery Team Warden and Ranger service was arranged into three area teams to ensure that work carried out on the ground took full account of the needs of local communities and landowners. Warden Teams worked largely to priorities set by the Park Direction Team through a commissioning process, dividing their time between different priority areas of work such as inland paths, the coast path, woodlands, sites and conservation work. The Ranger Team provided advice and support for landowners to deal with issues arising from recreational activity and also provided advice and training to recreational user groups such as the Pembrokeshire Outdoor Charter Group Members.

The Head of Park Delivery added that contacts within his team fell into two main categories – formal work with partner organisations and informal relationships with hundreds of landowners. Staff had a real pride doing a good job and in maintaining a good relationship with those landowners.

Members thanked officers for an interesting report but asked whether there needed to be greater communication of all the good work that was taking place. Local communities in particular were interested to know what was going on in their area. Officers agreed, noting that it was important to remember those many good relationships when there was negative publicity, however they would look into ways to promote these positive messages to the public.

NOTED.

[As the meeting had become quorate, the Chief Executive took the Chair for the next item - to seek nominations for Chairman of the Committee. Once elected the Chairman resumed the Chair]

8. Election of Chairman

It was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that Councillor R Kilmister be appointed Chair for the ensuing year.



9. **Appointment of Deputy Chair**

It was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that Mrs M Thomas be appointed Deputy Chair for the ensuing year, subject to her agreement. This appointment would be confirmed at the next meeting of the Committee.

10. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 22nd April 2015 were presented for confirmation and signature.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd April 2015 be confirmed and signed.

[Ms C Gwyther arrived during consideration of the following item]

11. **Presentation by Coed Cymru**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Roger Thomas, Chair of Coed Cymru and Ms Ffion Farnell, Executive Director of Tir Coed, to the meeting and thanked them for their patience, however it had been felt that it would be of greater benefit for the maximum number of Members possible to be present for the presentation.

Mr Thomas explained that while most Members were familiar with the work of Coed Cymru which focused on the sustainable management of Welsh woodlands for economic purposes, they may not be so familiar with the work of Tir Coed which focused on the social as well as environmental benefits of woodlands. His purpose that day was to explain the vision for Cilrhedyn and the opportunities that its retention would afford Wales. Coed Cymru's ethos was to use native woods in place of imported timber, and the package that was proposed by the two organisations would include native woodland management, product innovation, skills training and accreditation of courses, and the production and sale of wood products which would circulate money within the rural economy.

Ms Farnell then provided an overview of the work of Tir Coed which she explained had been established in 1999 and became a registered charity in 2007. The organisation was based in mid-west Wales but carried out work across the whole country. Their work sought to unlock the potential of woodlands to provide community facilities, educational and health activities and job opportunities whilst improving the woodland environment for wildlife and future generations. They had run several projects, mainly with young people not in education or training and the results had been good, providing them with skills training and accreditation as well offering apprenticeships, however their newest project VINE worked with whole communities. In 2012 the charity's social



enterprise WiseWoods Wales was launched which created outdoor furniture and play equipment for sale.

Members asked whether digital skills were taught to young people, and Ms Farnell replied that currently the organisation lacked the amenities to teach such skills as their facilities were all outdoors, however they were open to any opportunity for enhancing the training they were able to offer. They had links to a number of Local Education Authorities as well as the Youth Justice Board and were currently looking to run apprenticeships with Ceredigion County Council. Members also asked about Tir Coed's financial position and Ms Farnell explained that they had received Big Lottery funding for their latest three year project and were currently awaiting the outcome of several other funding bids. She acknowledged that funding would have to be sought to run any future projects, however the organisation had a plan to diversify its funding base through corporate sponsorship, fundraising and income generation. Their long term aim was to continue to sell services to Local Authorities, the Probation service and communities in order to provide goods and services that were needed.

Mr Thomas then outlined Coed Cymru's vision for Cilrhedyn and their proposal for use of the site. They believed that there was much funding coming through for woodlands to increase their competitiveness and for diversification of the rural economy, but there was a lack of skills to deliver on these opportunities. Cilrhedyn could therefore act as a training and production centre. Their Finance Manager had the skills to access funding, particularly Rural Development Plan (RDP) funding and Coed Cymru had been successful in obtaining core funding from Welsh Government. For long term viability of the site they suggested an asset transfer, allowing retention of the building by the National Park Authority with payment of a peppercorn rent as well as maintenance costs. The only cost to the Authority might be a charge for the warden accommodation which would be retained in the building. A community asset transfer would open doors for funding and a partnership bid would be submitted as soon as was practical to access this. In considering a timescale for the proposal, Mr Thomas suggested that a business plan could be produced over the next few weeks for officers' consideration.

Thanking Mr Thomas and Ms Farnell who had both travelled a long way in order to make their presentations, Members agreed that the proposition seemed attractive and worthwhile and they looked forward to being convinced by a business plan in the near future. The Chief Executive added that a meeting of the National Park Authority was scheduled for September and it was hoped that a report could be presented at that time. He also agreed that the Authority would consider being part of a partnership bid as soon as the relevant fund opened.



12. Planning – Customer Surveys

As the meeting had become quorate, the Chairman returned to this item (*Minute 4 refers*), and the recommendation given in the report was moved and seconded.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Committee fully supported the provision of a planning customer survey which was generic to all Wales' planning authorities.

13. Performance Report for the Period Ending 31st May 2015

As the meeting had become quorate, the Chairman returned to this item (*Minute 5 refers*). He reminded the Committee that during the debate it had been agreed that a letter should be written expressing the Committee's disappointment in the delay in producing guidance for the review of Local Development Plans. The Head of Park Direction would meet with Welsh Government the following week and provide an update on the matter to the meeting of the National Park Authority in July.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Performance Report be received and that a letter be prepared expressing the Committee's disappointment in the delay in producing guidance for the review of Local Development Plans. This letter to be sent after the next meeting of the National Park Authority when an update would be provided following the Head of Park Direction's meeting with Welsh Government.

14. Forward Work Programme

Members considered items suggested in the two-year forward programme for the Committee, which were listed as Tourism – impact of marketing activities on number of visits to NP and/or the quality of people's holiday experience(s); Recreation management – managing special events in the NP (Ironman, Red Bull, etc); and Social inclusion – future funding of social inclusion activities in light of current budget cuts.

Members felt that tourism would better be considered as a whole when the end of season figures were available and this item was deferred until the December meeting of the Committee. It was also noted that the management of natural resources was a topic for consideration at that meeting and it was agreed that Andrea Winterton, SW Operations Manager Pembrokeshire, Marine and Monitoring for Natural Resources Wales (NRW) should be invited to that or a future meeting of the Committee. One Member suggested that it might be helpful to consider the way the Authority interfaced with NRW prior to this.

It was **RESOLVED** that reports on the management of special events in the National Park and Social Inclusion, together with an outline of the Authority's work with Natural Resources Wales, would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.



15. Continuous Improvement Group: delegation of issues

It was **RESOLVED** that there were no issues that needed to be delegated to the Continuous Improvement Group for consideration.

