

**REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF DELIVERY AND DISCOVERY**

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**SUBJECT:  
FUTURE USE OF THE NATIONAL PARK SITE AT CILRHEDYN, LLANYCHAER**

**Introduction**

At the November 2015 National Park Authority the Chairman of Coed Cymru and the Director of Tir Coed put forward a business plan to take over responsibility of part of the National Park Authority site at Cilrhedyn and to manage a community woodland and wood products initiative from that site.

The minuted (draft) resolution at the end of the discussion read;

- a) the business case being put forward by Coed Cymru / Tir Coed be endorsed 'in principle' and that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to put in place the necessary arrangements to lease part of the site to Coed Cymru/Tir Coed by no later than March 31 2016 (subject to full analysis of revised business plan);
- b) the scaling back of the present activities at Cilrhedyn (in terms of the woodland centre/sawmill) be agreed in order to meet the budgetary targets for 2016-17 and endorsement of the advertising of the remaining building and yard space on the open market if the Tir Coed / Coed Cymru option failed.

Since then the progress of the Rural Development Plan (RDP) funding has been slower than anticipated and following a meeting of the Tir Coed Board which took place at Cilrhedyn on January 14<sup>th</sup> the Chairman of Coed Cymru has proposed that their operation at Cilrhedyn could not now start until December 2016 (See attached proposal).

While the end goal of a partnership with Tir Coed at Cilrhedyn is very desirable for the NPA it is clear that this proposed delay involves a significant cost to the authority.

Operating costs at Cilrhedyn have been reduced significantly in 2015-6. We expect the centre to operate at a net cost to the authority (Not including central services recharges) of £41,000 by the end of this financial year down from £75,000 in 2014-5.

To maintain the centre so that it would be available to transfer to Tir Coed in December 2016 would involve keeping the present working arrangements in place for another ten months. This is based on an assumption that the net operating costs are likely to be much the same as at present but continuing to generate most of the furniture used by the authority on sites and paths throughout the park. The centre would remain available for the north warden and ranger team as an operating base.

Since the viability of this proposal is dependent on the ability of Coed Cymru and Tir Coed to apply for RDP funding, it should be evident whether this approach is likely to succeed or fail by around September 2016 if the timetable put forward is followed.

#### Financial Risk & Compliance Considerations

The changed timetable for the Tir Coed proposal has come about from a delay in the RDP timetable that is beyond the control of either Tir Coed or Coed Cymru; it is not evidence of any underlying weakness in their proposal. There is a clear desire from the organisations concerned to progress the agreement but the delay does put back the time when the costs to the authority of managing the centre can be passed on. A better than expected budget settlement, along with minor budget adjustments means that this delay can be accommodated.

#### Human Rights / Equality issues

No issues in terms of public service but consultation with the on-site staff must be a priority.

#### Biodiversity implications / Sustainability appraisal

No issues.

#### Welsh Language statement

No issues.

#### **Recommendations**

***Members are requested to agree to the continuation of operation of the Cilrhedyn Centre at the present staffing level until the end of 2016, subject to clear evidence that the Coed Cymru / Tir Coed partnership are making progress in defining their business plan and obtaining the necessary European funding.***

#### Background Documents

Future Use Of The National Park Site At Cilrhedyn, Llanychaer Report of Director of Delivery and Discovery National Park Authority November 2015.

Update Report on the Cilrhedyn Woodland Centre Operational Review Committee  
15/10/2014

Cilrhedyn Woodland Centre Verbal Update - Minutes of the meeting of the Operational Review Committee 22/04/2015

Presentation by Coed Cymru & Tir Coed - Minutes of the meeting of the Operational Review Committee 01/07/2015

*(For further information, please contact Charles Mathieson Head of Park Delivery)*

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## Cilrhedyn Woodland Centre – update from Coed Cymru & Tir Coed 22/01/2016

**Summary** – delays in the release of the relevant measures (Measures 16 ) under the 2016-2022 Welsh Government Rural Communities Development Plan (RDP) have frustrated achieving the timetable for taking over the Cilrhedyn Woodland Centre (the Centre) by the Coed Cymru/Tir coed Partnership (the Partnership). This update paper explains what has happened, the work that has nevertheless been undertaken by the Partnership and proposes revised approaches for meeting the original objectives of the Partnership.

### Introduction

At the last PCNPA meeting, on 18 November 2015, members accepted in principle a proposal by the Partnership to assume control of the Centre from 1 April 2016, should market research, consultation and funding submissions support the proposed model. This was predicated on a successful bid into the Cooperative Measures of the RDP. We had originally intended to come to the meeting with an approved EOI from the first October window of measure 16.4. However, the rules relating to this measure changed during the EOI window and to our knowledge no applications have yet been progressed. We were expecting a second revised EOI window in late November, with an invitation to submit a full bid in January 2016 and the release of funding from April 2016. Following the Spending Review nothing has been released, requiring the Partnership to reconsider its approach. There is, as yet, no defined date for submitting an EOI, although Welsh Government (WG) officials have indicated that something is expected before the end of the financial year, though we do not yet know what activities this will cover.

### The original plan

#### **CILRHEDYN CENTRE-A WOODLAND HUB:**

**Combining commercial, third sector and public sector delivery models to provide long term, sustainable benefits for land management and to create opportunities for local people.**

- Sustain a product manufacturing base and create employment.
- Add value to land, woodlands and timber in the region.
- Inspire and innovate new products and SMEs.
- Increase the environmental benefits of regional woodlands.
- Improve access and recreational opportunities for the local community.
- Train people in need of up-skilling and support learners to gain sustainable livelihoods appropriate to the rural community.
- Bring life back to Welsh woodlands.



## **Work undertaken since 18/11/15**

In the period up to Christmas, the Partnership worked on its Business Plan and also opened discussions with WG officials on future intentions with respect to native woodlands, on the likely implementation of the recommended standard for Wales Coastal Path furniture and on the importance of the network of Coed Cymru Woodland Officers to the delivery of WG aims and objectives. The partnership model was well received and supported in principle. A meeting was also held with the Woodland Officers to appraise them of intentions and developments.

Contact was established with a group of businesses based in the Gwaun Valley that had previously expressed interest in taking on the Centre; although subsequent discussions are in their early stages, the possibility remains that the Centre could provide a base for some future commercial work for this group or other local businesses. This model needs further investigation.

Development of plans for future training and accreditation opportunities, together with the associated bids for funding, have continued in line with the proposal presented to the PCNPA. Over 20 organizations in North Pembroke shire have been consulted via phone interviews to ascertain whether they would be interested in engaging with the Tir Coed model; this has received a positive response from all. Stakeholder events in Pembroke shire are currently being organized for Spring 2016.

A comprehensive funding plan to enable both the full charitable project and a pilot (based at the Centre) has been developed, Stage 1 funding applications have been written and these will be submitted at the end of January 2016. If these bids are successful, a 7-month pilot training project would commence in December 2016, with the main project initiating in July 2017.

The Partnership has started negotiating whether training activities could take place in Trecwn woodland, as this has been unmanaged for many years and would provide more training opportunities than the PCNPA woodlands visited in 2015. A visit is scheduled for February, but we have been advised that negotiations will have to be sensitively managed as this site has never previously been open to the public.

An inquiry into the availability of 'Making Local Woods Work' funding support for a feasibility study for the Cilrhedyn commercial activity has been made, together with an application for research support, into the LEADER programme.

A full meeting of the Tir Coed Board of Trustees, attended by Coed Cymru, was held at the Centre on 15 January 2016; this included a tour of the site and introduction to current Cilrhedyn staff. Trustees recognized that, although the Centre provided opportunities for both charitable and commercial activities, the delay in the RDP, the need for further market research and time-frames for the availability of funding would result in the necessity of an extended development phase.

## **5. Partnership response to delayed RDP scheme:**

### **January 16:**

- Submit funding bids to support Tir Coed's Cilrhedyn project LEAF (Learning to Enable Achievement and Fulfilment)
- Submit proposal to Making Local Woods work to fund a feasibility study.
- Comprehensive consultation with referral organisations, local businesses and beneficiaries.

**February 16:**

- Anticipated opening of the relevant RDP measures - with immediate EoI submission from the Partnership.
- Discussions with PCNPA about interim strategy.
- Meet with Plened about Pembrokeshire LEADER programme.
- Street surveys planned, to research interest in the Woodland Centre and local woodlands in the Gwaun Valley.
- Letters of support for the proposal collated.

**March 16:**

- Outcome of Stage 1 application for full LEAF project- if successful a 6-month Stage 2 development phase begins.
- Feasibility study commissioned, if funding available.

**April 16:**

- Stakeholder events held in Pembrokeshire with presentations about the Cilrhedyn Centre, the partnership and associated LEAF project.

**May 16:**

- Response as to whether LEAF pilot bid successful.

**August 16:**

- Stage 2 application for full LEAF project submitted.
- Feasibility study and market research completed.

**September 16:**

- (If timescale predictions are accurate) RDP outcome announced.

**December 16:**

- LEAF pilot begins at Cilrhedyn Centre, if bid successful.

**Conclusion:**

Although developments have been restricted by the delays in the RDP, the Partnership has advanced the Cilrhedyn project significantly since November, identifying a number of potential collaborations, funding sources, market development and approaches to the business model.

We anticipate the launch of a pan-Wales land management scheme through the RDP in early February and the Partnership will submit a bid to deliver landscape-scale projects. This could contribute to the work at Cilrhedyn and we anticipate that that this funding would be in place from September 2016.

We have also submitted bids for the training and outreach aspects of the proposal and have a clear fundraising strategy which, if successful, will see that activity initiating at Cilrhedyn in December 2016.

In the short term we recognise the budgetary pressures at the Centre and we will continue to work closely with the Cilrhedyn management team to identify workable interim solutions and sources of short term funding to ensure the Centre remains viable.