

# Clock is ticking, public told in fight over visitor centre

**CONCERNED** residents are fighting to save a "significant" facility built thanks to a bequest.

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority recently began a consultation on the future of Newport and Tenby's visitor centres, as members consider new ways of providing services.

A public meeting chaired by Cllr Mike James was held in Newport's Memorial Hall last week. Meanwhile, a petition calling for the centre to be kept open has now gained more than 400 signatures.

**By Anwen Humfrey**

01437 765000

wtnews@westerntelegraph.co.uk

Twitter @WTelegraph

James Parkin, authority director of delivery and discovery, said there was a need to adapt to changing visitor needs, such as greater demand for online information, and to reduce the authority's building portfolio in a move towards a cheaper, "people-focused" service, which could involve mobile information points.

Mr Parkin said: "It's about enhancing the customer experience in terms of enjoying the national park."

The Newport centre attracts around 38,000 visitors a year, running at a cost of £21,000, which some of those present suggested could be supported by asking for a 50p donation from those using the services.

Many locals and visitors at the meeting called for the centre to be retained, describing it as a "significant Newport service" that was easily accessible, and impor-

tant for tourists and businesses.

Concerns were raised about the potential sale of the building, which was bought following a bequest of a house to the authority by a Newport resident. The move was described as "selling off the family silver".

Reg Atkinson questioned whether money raised through the sale of the building would be used at the Tenby centre to pay to exit its lease, which was immediately denied by the authority. He added it would be a "great

shame" for a bequest to be used in this way.

Mr Atkinson said: "Holidaymakers and local people are very enthusiastic about our visitor centre and how good it is. It's wonderful. To close the least expensive centre in Pembrokeshire makes no sense."

Mr Parkin added: "There are different ways of funding the service, we are willing to look at them, but the clock is ticking. Our budget is diminishing."

The consultation period will end on Monday.