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Paul Davies, Esq

Conservative Assembly Member, Preseli Pembrokeshire.

04/11/2016

Dear Mr Davies

The Future of Newport Visitor and Information Centre

I am writing down the points that I will make to you at your surgery in Newport today

Confusion about what is happening

I refer you to an un-answered email sent by me to the PCNPA Chief Executive nearly 2 weeks ago (attached) in which I have quoted the CEO as saying first of all that National Park "*Members were unanimous in supporting the recommendation of the Task and Finish Group as set out in the original committee paper*" That recommendation was "***To consult** on a proposal to change the way information services are delivered in Tenby and Newport in order to invest in a package of new initiatives aimed at supporting the growth of the wider visitor economy in Pembrokeshire*"

However, the CEO has subsequently asked Visitor Centre staff to tell people that "***Members unanimously agreed to withdraw from our buildings in Tenby and Newport as soon as possible***"

As I have indicated in the email, I believe that the CEO is being unfair to the people of Newport, businesses and visitors, in that we cannot define the task we face. As you will have learnt from members of Newport Library Working Group, at least that community group would like to operate from the Visitor Centre, rather than the poorly located current premises, but we do not know whether we will need to purchase the building or not.

Insufficient Consultation

Apparently, following 5 meetings of a National Park Task and Finish Group set up in March 2015 to explore *The Future Provision of Information to Visitors*, about which the public knew nothing, and through which Members were given misleading information about what Newport Visitor Centre does and what it achieves for the environment, community, visitors, socio-cultural wellbeing and economy of the area, the Director of Delivery and Discovery reported to the full Authority on 28th September 2016, with the recommendation as stated above.

An article in the Western Telegraph printed the same day, and obviously therefore as a result of a press statement from the Park, was the first that people knew of all of this.

Some days later, the Centre staff were asked to put up a poster - a very ineffective way of reaching people with information in Newport – to advertise a public meeting "*to discuss proposals to change the way that information services are delivered in Newport*" There has been nothing on the PCNPA website to advertise this public "consultation" It was up to the Community Forum to publicise what was happening. The "consultation" lasted till 31st October, barely a month. Despite being directly asked at the meeting if we were discussing closure, an answer was carefully avoided.

The one 2 hour meeting run by the Authority in Newport and attended by the Chairman, Chief Executive and Director of Delivery and Discovery consisted of a presentation on proposed changes to delivering the service and a chance to respond from the floor. Speaker after speaker then spoke of the importance of the centre to Newport and the North East of the Park, and made it absolutely clear to officers that insufficient evidence had been given to justify replacing the service with new methods of delivery and whether they would even work here. The existing Centre is specially designed to be fully accessible and conveniently sited by the public car park, and at a coastal bus stop, whereas businesses in Newport in which it is proposed to train volunteer ambassadors to deliver information, are not easily accessible and very difficult to park close to.

The Forum set up a website <http://savenewportvisitorcentre.naeg.com> and arranged a petition which collected 914 signatures in 3 weeks and is still growing

The Forum arranged its own meeting bringing together those who are actually willing to put in time to help save Newport Visitor Centre for the community. A very well attended meeting resolved to set up an Action Group to *investigate, challenge and oppose closure* of the Centre, and a letter has gone to the CEO informing the Authority of this.

The National Park is failing to respect Newport's position in Wales Spatial Plan

The National Park is proposing dividing the Park into 3 information hub areas – The South, based on Carew Castle; the North West based on Oriel Y Parc and the North East based on Castell Henllys. Newport is a Tier 3 Centre in the *Wales Spatial Plan*, meaning that it has a strategic role to play in the geographical area it serves. It is easily reached by public transport, on National and Regional Cycle Routes and the Coastal Path. It would be contrary to the *Wales Spatial Plan* to base information services for this area at Castell Henllys in future.

I believe both the way the National Park has gone about communicating with local people, businesses and visitors and their proposals for the future are contrary to the *Wellbeing of Future Generations Act* and contrary to the *Wales Programme for Government, Taking Wales Forward*, where under Community Assets it is stated that government will “*Work with communities to protect local facilities that bring people together*” and “*introduce measures to prevent unnecessary closures and to help communities take ownership of community assets*”

We were originally told that a final decision would be made by Members at the next meeting of the full Authority on 31st November and any changes will be introduced before next summer season. I understand that in England, communities are afforded 6 months under the Localism Act and Registration of Community Asset Regulations 2012, to arrange to acquire a facility to meet community need. Those of us who campaigned for this Act to apply in Wales, but were told that its provisions were unnecessary here, will feel very let down if similar length of time is not afforded to Newport now.

If you could talk to Tegryn Jones to request him to give this community clarity about what has been decided, I should be very grateful.

I should be grateful if you could tell us whom this community could approach in government to help us in saving Newport Visitor Centre for the community.

Thank you,

Kind regards,

Sandra Bayes Secretary Newport and District Community Forum