

Newport Visitor Centre Action Group (NVCAG)

Outline of our Preferred Option for the Future of Newport Visitor and Information Service:

The National Park Authority's wishes are

- to reduce operating costs in order to be able to re-allocate a proportion of current expenditure to new methods of delivery of information, and
- to change the way the Visitor Service is provided in Newport.

Newport Visitor Centre Action Group was formed, by election, at a public meeting which was called to "*Save Newport Visitor and Information Centre*" when it was mandated to "*investigate, challenge, and oppose closure of Newport Visitor Centre*"

Opposition to threatened closure of the Visitor and Information Service in Newport is very strong, and has been demonstrated by

- the response from the floor at what the Authority called *an extremely well attended public meeting* in Newport on 18th October 2016, called to discuss proposals to change the way information services are delivered in Newport
- what the Authority called "*a significant number of responses relating to the proposed changes to visitor services in Newport (including responses from outside Pembrokeshire) ...all of which opposed the closure of Newport.*"
- 1200 signatures on a **petition** which continues to raise support

"We who live in, work in, or visit the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, call upon the Authority

- *To make every effort to see the Newport Visitor & Information Centre kept open, and*
- *To work with the community to expand the services offered by the Centre to the benefit of people using this area."*

- The many comments on the on-line petition, all in opposition to changes, examples of which are attached to this document
- The many comments in the Visitor Centre Book, complementing the existing Service and calling for it to be retained
- Recent research, and local anecdotal evidence, has shown that Visitor and Information Centres do provide what is required by today's visitors, and that access to information by people using smart devices is not as satisfactory as face to face contact.

Our following proposal meets both the requirements of the Park and our stated purpose

THE NVCAG PROPOSAL IS THAT:

- PCNPA continues to own Newport Visitor Centre building and run the Visitor and Information Service with community support.
- The Visitor Centre building is shared with Newport Community Library according to the agreed layout plan (attached)
- The office continues to be used by National Park Rangers and Officers, but it is hoped that the potential of this space will be maximised by being used by those organisations for which the Community Library already hosts space, such as CAB and PAVS Community Connectors, as well as others, thus strengthening the facility as a Community Hub

The Community Library is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, and has its own committee of volunteers (Newport Library Working Group) who work in partnership with Pembrokeshire County Council to deliver the Library Service under a Service Level Agreement.

The Visitor Centre will likewise have its own committee of volunteers (Newport Visitor Centre Action Group, a Section of Newport and District Community Forum, a fully constituted community group), which will work in partnership with PCNPA to support The National Park's Visitor Service in Newport, under a Service Level Agreement with the Authority.

There will also be a joint management committee of users of the building.

BENEFITS TO NEWPORT COMMUNITY LIBRARY

- Newport Community Library will be in a better location with parking close by, and in fully accessible premises.
- It will also have reduced costs compared to at present, and better security of tenure.
- It will benefit from cooperation and sharing, with an established service that is proven to be well-run: there will be synergy in the two related services working together, each benefitting from the others' footfall.
- From the point of view of the public – both residents and visitors, having a single point from which to access information, is both much more convenient and easier to understand. Visiting the Centre for one purpose, may well answer other needs.

BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY AND VISITORS OF THIS PROPOSAL

- As the Authority has already budgeted for Newport Visitor Centre to remain open until March 2018, our proposal will provide a simple and seamless solution to continuing the Visitor Service with minimal disruption.
- It better ensures continuation of a full Visitor and Information Service, providing the economic, social and cultural benefits to businesses, residents and visitors as is being achieved now.
- This avoids the burden and responsibility on the community group of running the service and releases the full community energies available to maximise volunteer support in manning the Service.
- Our volunteers who have local experience and knowledge of the area will be able to best serve those many members of the public who do not want to rely on digital solutions to find their way round.
- Newport's only wet-weather facility will be retained.
- The wishes of 1200 signatories to the "Save Newport Visitor Centre" petition and all those who have signed the Newport Visitor Book, and written to the National Park, seeking its retention, will be fully met.

BENEFITS TO THE NATIONAL PARK OF THIS PROPOSAL

- There will be a reduction in the revenue costs of the Visitor Service in Newport – by a lowering of staffing costs through the introduction of volunteers, as well as through receipt of a contribution towards running costs from Newport Community Library (and potentially other voluntary organisations).
- This will enable the Authority to use these savings to support introduction of the new package of initiatives that it seeks to provide.
- It provides a new, effective and exciting way of delivering Visitor and Information Services in Newport, as required by Members of the National Park Authority, by introducing a co-production model through a partnership with a local voluntary group, which could be replicated elsewhere.
- Volunteers will be able to concentrate on helping to maximise the potential of the building and grounds
- They will be able to restore the garden, which will not only give pleasure to residents and visitors, but enable the Parks to pursue an educational opportunity inter alia by demonstrating the diversity of flora in the National Park to children and others.

- The continuation of Newport Visitor Centre as it is now will maintain the profile of the National Park and ensure that the work of the Authority continues to be promoted in the area.
- It will support the National Park in fulfilling its statutory purposes and its wellbeing objectives, as set out in its Corporate and Resources Plan 2017-18.
- The National Park will have heeded the wishes of residents and visitors and local tourism businesses which can only improve its reputation and standing.
- The National Park will retain a valuable asset.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

It has become a real possibility that there might be a positive reception from the National Park Authority to the idea of their continuing to own the building and working with the community to co-produce a “Community Supported Visitor and Information Centre”

Continuation of the use of the office as an outpost facility and welcoming the Community Library to share the premises will maximise the use of the premises to the benefit of all.

Significant costs will be saved, enabling the National Park to explore new methods of delivery of information

This is a simpler and more satisfactory solution, makes the most of what volunteers can offer, is more advantageous to the National Park, visitors and residents, than others under consideration, and will allow a more seamless transition.

Therefore our preferred option is for the National Park to retain the building and to operate the Visitor and Information Service as at present.

RELEVANT POLICIES AND DECISIONS OF THE NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

1. Under the Environment Act 1995, a National Park's duty and purpose is ***"To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area by the public"*** and whilst doing this, ***"to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities"***.
2. In meeting their obligations under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015, the Authority has set out Wellbeing Objectives in its Corporate and Resources Plan 2017-2018, including, ***"To encourage and support the development of sustainable employment and businesses, particularly in tourism and recreation"***; ***"To work alongside communities to make the most of the National Park"*** and ***"To protect and promote the local culture of language, arts and heritage"***.
3. The Authority's *Provision of Information to Visitors* Working Group which met between May 2015 and August 2016 proposed that ***"the Authority would like to put in place partnership arrangements that will ensure that ...Newport ...continue to receive localised visitor information services so that we can re-allocate a proportion of the current expenditure associated with the Authority's premises in order to support the package of new initiatives ...aimed at delivering a modernised and more equitable service across the National Park."***
4. On 28th September 2016, the Authority resolved to ***"consult on a proposal to change the way information services were delivered in ...Newport in order to invest in a package of new initiatives aimed at supporting the growth of the wider visitor economy in Pembrokeshire"***
5. The consultation period has since been extended by the Authority and will now end on 31st August 2017
6. On 1st February 2017 the Authority resolved that ***"the Newport Visitor Centre be kept open for the entirety of the 2017 season (end of October 2017) with no changes to the present levels of service and/or opening hours"***

Appendix 2

RELEVANT DECISIONS OF NEWPORT TOWN COUNCIL

1. Talks about the future of Newport Visitor Service and Newport Library between PCNPA and PCC with Newport Town Council, together with studies of alternative use of, and of all available, venues, in 2014 culminated in Newport Town Council writing to PCNPA and PCC as follows,
“We would wholeheartedly request that the TIC and the Library in Newport remain open and in their present locations. Throughout our discussions we concluded that both facilities were heavily used, above average in fact, and a loss of either one would impact heavily on Newport”
2. On 31st January 2017, Newport Town Council wrote to the National Park Authority saying
3. ***“Newport Town Council (the Council) echoes the feeling of town which is that PCNPA continues to run Newport Visitors Centre (the Visitors Centre) as at present”***
If the Authority did not do so, then the Council would proceed to acquire the Visitor Centre. This statement was repeated to the Director of Delivery and Discovery in August 2017.