

## Newport and District Community Forum **Newport Visitor Centre Action Group (NVCAG)**

**Ever since we first heard of a shadow over the National Park's Newport Visitor Centre, the Forum has worked hard, devoting hundreds of hours to retaining a full National Park Visitor Service in Newport**

- Inviting both PCNPA and PCC to stand at Newport Awareness Day 2015 to explain the situation
- Advertising the National Park's public meeting in October 2016 held to "*discuss proposals to change the way information services are delivered in Newport*" (The National Park Members have never at any point decided to close the Visitor Centre here)
- Obtaining through a FoI request the work of the PCNPA Task and Finish Group on Future Delivery of Information Services to Visitors 2015/16
- Analysing and commenting on the Authority's relevant Reports, and challenging the justification in potentially closing the Visitor Centre
- Holding a further public meeting to bring together those interested to help to save Newport Visitor Centre
- Setting up Newport Visitor Centre Action Group as a Section of the Forum "*To investigate, challenge and oppose the closure of Newport Visitor Centre*".
- Establishing the "*Save Newport Visitor Centre*" website and keeping this updated
- Running the petition which has accumulated more than 1,200 signatures and many comments on line "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 AND 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"
- Lobbying PCNPA Members, our local AM and MP
- Talking to Visitors and Visitor Centre staff about what is most needed to be retained
- Measuring the building and its existing contents
- Measuring the Community Library and its existing contents
- Drawing up a proposed Layout Plan which was acceptable also to The Community Library, and more recently, the Town Council
- Standing on Newport market to talk to local residents and visitors about potentially volunteering to support the National Park in running the Visitor Service
- Visiting other Centres, including Saundersfoot PCC Library where there is a small TIC, and Haverfordwest's Pop-Up Visitor Service which is run entirely by volunteers, as well as making contact with some of those Centres in other parts of Wales in a similar situation
- Looking at the possibility of involving more people through Time Banking
- Working with the Town Council's Visitor Centre Working Group which consists of NVCAG, the Community Library Working Group and Town Council since its inception in December 2016, during which time it was assumed that NVCAG would cooperate with the National Park in future in running the Visitor Service

**We have achieved a great deal. Whilst National Park Members took the decision in February to close its Visitor Centre in Tenby, a further 6 months was granted to consult with Newport, it was decided to keep the Visitor Service here going till at least the end of the 2017 season, and the National Park has budgeted to keep it running till March 2018.**

The Town Council has always stipulated that contact with the National Park be through the council but its Working Group finally agreed that Forum reps could go to Pembroke Dock to talk to the Parks Director of Delivery and Discovery and the Finance Officer direct about what partnership with PCNPA in running the Visitor Service might

mean. At that meeting we were told that one option was for the National Park to still retain the building, for the Community Library to move in, contributing to running costs, and for the Forum to further reduce costs to the National Park by providing volunteer support to the Visitor Service.

After consulting with other members of NVCAG, this became our Preferred Option. It completely satisfied our aims, what we understand to be the community', businesses' and visitors' wishes, and the National Park's goals within its Corporate Plan and also under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

Now, a Report from the Director of Delivery and Discovery (with contributions from the Finance Officer and Performance and Compliance Coordinator) delivered to the National Park Operational Review Committee only yesterday (when 3 of us went to Pembroke Dock to observe), has been extremely positive about the performance of Newport Visitor Centre over this past year, recommending the following priorities for consideration by the Committee

- *Update interpretation at the centre and review ways that National Park promotion and wider interpretive information can be improved.*
- *Continue to provide visitor information and a selling / marketing platform for local artists and craft makers.*
- *Update and promote the 'Treasure Trail' that introduces visitors to the National Park and Newport.*
- *Continue to provide hot-desk facilities for PCNPA staff,*

and adding suggestions from Centre staff and rangers

- *Be proactive in developing additional National Park and community use of the centre.*
- *Develop a social media presence and Trip Advisor account*
- *Develop and expand the merchandise ranges.*
- *Use the centre for local talks and small events and activities.*
- *Develop more activities, in conjunction with Rangers and the Discovery Team that leave from the centre and explore the local history, culture and landscape.*

There are now 3 possibilities for National Park Committee Members to consider at a full meeting of the Authority on 27<sup>th</sup> September.

These are

1. For the National Park to retain the Centre and run it as it is
2. For the National Park to retain the Centre, for the Community Library to move in continuing its partnership with the County Council, and for the Forum to work in partnership with the National Park by providing volunteers to support the Visitor Service; for the office to be used not only by PCNPA staff but by community initiatives as well
3. For the Town Council to lease the building for 3 years with the option to buy at any time, with Newport Library Working Group providing volunteers for both the Library and the Visitor Service. For PCNPA to lease back use of the office for hot desking

It is our considered view that only the first 2 options will continue to deliver a full Visitor Service.

The second option – NVCAG's Preferred Option - will also save costs for the National Park, could provide a model of good practice in itself - enabling PCNPA to explore other methods of delivery of information to visitors as well - will provide volunteers who are fresh, dedicated and keen to support the Visitor Service and prevent it being reduced to a mere TIC, without interpretation facilities, and possibly just a community managed service.

Our tasks now include

- to identify more volunteers
- to increase the size of NVCAG itself and consider its status
- to continue to explain to PCNPA Members how important it is for Newport to keep the National Park Visitor Service
- to encourage others to lobby Members, our MP and AMs