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Circulation: All PCNPA Members cc Eluned Morgan Paul Davies

(Our emphasis throughout)

Dear

Newport Visitor Centre

We have now read the Minutes of the last meeting of the Authority, and it is apparent that, in addition to a vote for an option which was not an option, there is a further mistaken basis which led to your decision.

The current minutes state that

“at the meeting of the National Park Authority in September 2016 **it had been agreed** that its approach should move away from a traditional ‘visitor centre’ model of service delivery in order to invest in a package of new initiatives in partnership with the tourism trade and local community”

It was said at the Authority’s meeting in Dale in September 2016 that

*“Ultimately the Authority **would like to put in place partnership arrangements** that would ensure that both Newport and Tenby continued to receive localised visitor information services so that **a proportion of the current expenditure** associated with the Authority’s premises could be re-allocated in order to support the package of new initiatives aimed at delivery of a modernised and more equitable service across the National Park”*

The actual resolution in Dale 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”. (Ironically, one of these is for National Park static tourist information at the new Library in Haverforwest)*

You would surely concur that a proposal is not the same as having decided on the action. There was no point in consulting if the decision had already been made. **It was not already agreed** in 2016 to close Newport. We observed that 2 of your Members who voted for Option 3, said that they thought this was the case.

There are now new factors that need to be taken into consideration that were not available to the Members in 2016, and conclusions that are now doubted, such as that centres no longer provide what is required by today's visitors as a result of online information and booking.

The Members in Dale did not know of the strength of reasoned opposition against closure or how the needs of residents and visitors, which the Authority now puts at the very heart of decision making, are overwhelmingly in favour of keeping Newport Visitor Centre and the service provided there. The petition and letters have been acknowledged by officers, but the views of now 1,500 people have played no part in your decision making. Perhaps this is because you thought, mistakenly, that the decision to close had been made at Dale.

Members in 2016, would not have benefitted from reading the up-to-date Report (12/17) on the Newport Centre

http://www.pembrokeshirecoast.wales/Files/files/Committee/Operational%20Review/2017%20September%206/12_17%20Newport%20TIC.pdf

and known that the Centre was not only very good value for money but is giving a gold standard Visitor Service, maintaining the profile of the National Park and promoting its work in the way that is now proposed to do.

Members would not have appreciated, as you must surely do, that the new initiatives for delivery of information might work in the South, but roaming ambassadors and pop-ups etc are just not appropriate here. The out of the way Castell Henllys can never replace Newport Visitor Centre which is purpose designed, fully accessible and ideally located close to the Coastal Path, by a public carpark and bus routes.

You are probably thinking, *why does this group continue to argue against closure of this Service and with some of the same arguments that the Friends of the National Park have used in their two letters to you?* We do so because it seems so wrong that for the sake of some new methods of delivery, **for which you have no cogent proof of success**, you will destroy a service which undeniably carries out so well your purpose under the Environment Act 1955

to promote opportunities for public enjoyment and understanding of the special qualities of the National Park

as well as your duty in doing so:

to foster the economic and social well-being of communities living within the National Park.

Newport Visitor Centre Action Group held a packed-out public meeting in Newport this month to advise what the present position is. Responding to the wishes of the meeting, Newport Town Council re-affirmed their intention to acquire the building to satisfy the unanimous view of community that they want a Visitor Service kept, and the Community Library incorporated into the building – which has consistently been the aim of all those working on this issue during the consultation process.

Your Chief Executive was seriously criticised for the high-handed attitude that, because the library, quite rightly, and for the reasons set out to you in their letter to you, rejected Option 3, *“This now means that **there will be no TIC provision of any kind in Newport**”* Fortunately, this short-sighted attitude is not supported by the minutes of your meeting and **you have made no such decision. You did, however, approve of an integrated Visitor and library service**, albeit in a different building.

It is stated in the current minutes, *“If the recommendation was approved, the building would be deemed ‘surplus to requirements, in line with the Authority’s asset management policy, and a paper for the future disposal of the building could be presented by officers at a future meeting of the Authority.”* As Option 3 cannot be implemented, Newport Visitor Centre is not *“surplus to requirements”*, and disposal of the building cannot be justified.

The current minutes omit to state that, as well as the Community Library Charity, PCC had already supported the move of the Library to the Visitor Centre building, as is the case for both options 1 and 2, and welcomed the improved location and the advantages of sharing with the Visitor Service in a much better building. These community options should now be revisited.

Under Section 5 of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015, *“A public body must take account of ... (a) The importance of balancing short term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to meet long term needs, especially where things done to meet short term needs may have detrimental long term effect”* Section 5 also requires you to *“Involve people and communities in decisions which may change the services you provide to them”* and *“in decisions about the management of assets, so they can be used for the benefit of communities”* The Authority is failing to put the citizen first in its handling of the future of Newport Visitor Centre, and is in breach of the Statutory Guidance on the Act.

We ask you to raise these serious issues under Matters Arising from the minutes of the Authority’s meeting of 27th September and during consideration of Report 51/17.

Yours sincerely

Lady Hallinan, Chairperson, Newport Visitor Centre Action Group

For your convenience, we enclose a paper copy of our letter to you of 20th November 2017