

**REPORT ON BEHALF OF THE PROJECTS & PROPERTY GROUP**

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**SUBJECT: Update On The Disposal Of The Authority's Premises At Long Street In Newport**

**INTRODUCTION**

On the 29<sup>th</sup> November 2017 Members resolved to dispose of the Authority's premises at Long Street in Newport by offering it for sale on the open market with full vacant possession with the caveat that, prior to doing so, the Authority should invite and give consideration to any viable Community Asset Transfer (CAT) based proposals which it received.

Members are reminded that CAT is a mechanism by which public body's may give reasonable consideration to proposals for the use of operationally surplus assets from community based legal entity's which would otherwise be disposed of in the open market.

In the interests of equity and full market transparency JJ Morris Chartered Surveys undertook a marketing exercise inviting expressions of interest (EOI's) within the principle of Community Asset Transfer. Their marketing activities commenced in mid-January and continued up to the closing date for submission of any EOI's at noon on the 28th February 2018. During that marketing period approximately 10 information packs were sent out in response to requests from interested parties, two interested parties undertook site inspections and two EOI applications were submitted in the required form on or before the closing date.

One was submitted by a private individual seeking business premises to provide a nursery for young children in the area to be run as a new commercial venture. The other was submitted by Newport Town Council seeking occupation of the building to relocate the town's library, provide visitor information services and consolidate the activities of the Town Council in to this single premise.

CAT is not a mechanism to facilitate the use of surplus public assets for private commercial gain and as such further consideration of the private individuals interest would be inappropriate outside of any arm's length open marketing exercise that the Authority may wish to undertake at a later date. In contrast the EOI submitted by Newport Town Council suggests a proposed use of the premises as a not for profit venture on behalf of the community and is, therefore, eligible for consideration under CAT criteria.

It would therefore be appropriate to offer Newport Town Council the status of preferred party for a fixed period of time, and to the exclusion of all other parties, to allow their proposal to be fully explored and subsequently presented to Members as a detailed business case. In the interim any further marketing of the premises in pursuit of an arm's-length disposal of the building on the open should remain on-hold pending an Authority resolution of a detailed proposal from Newport Town Council.

**Financial, Risk & Compliance Considerations**

The Authority has now actively and publicly promoted this Community Asset Transfer opportunity to include express reference to the Welsh Government document '*Community*

*Asset Transfers in Wales-A Best Practise Guide March 2016*. PCNPA Officers have given consideration to the initial EOs received and are now recommending a preferred party (i.e. Newport Town Council) with whom further discussions should continue to the exclusion of all others.

However, the Authority is under no obligation to proceed with that party and may withdraw from the process at any time in favour of offering the premises for sale on the open market if it considers the Community Asset Transfer proposal under discussion is not viable. In particular, given the recent and substantial reduction in the Authority's revenue funding from Welsh Government, circa £400k over 2 years, Members may wish to reflect on pursuing a course of action that restricts the ability of the Authority to achieve the full commercial value of the building in the near future.

If Members actively still wish to enter into CAT negotiations with Newport Town Council the associated Welsh Government guidance suggests that 6 months is a reasonable target period within which to develop and fully explore the viability of the preferred party's interest.

The development of a detailed proposal will, therefore, take up to 6 months which has implications for the provision of visitor information during the 2018 season. A number of initiatives are underway (see Appendix A) that will help to provide support for visitors but the Long Street building will remain closed until a viable business case and all associated legal arrangements have been ratified via a future NPA meeting. On this basis, it is still unlikely that the Long Street premises would 'transfer' to a community body (in this case Newport Town Council) and re-open until at least Autumn 2018.

#### **Human Rights/Equality Issues**

All interested parties have been given an equal opportunity to submit a Community Asset Transfer proposal.

#### **Biodiversity Implications/Sustainability Appraisal**

No issues

#### **Welsh Language Statement**

No issues

**RECCOMENDATION: That Member's authorise Officers to progress detailed discussions with Newport Town Council to the exclusion of all others in pursuit of a possible Community Asset Transfer of its premises at Long Street in Newport. It is proposed that discussions progress on a leasehold basis and that an update on those discussions should form the subject of a further paper for consideration by Members within the next 6 months.**

## APPENDIX A – Ongoing Tourism Support – Newport and Surrounding Area

### Visitor Information

Over the Easter period, visitors to North Pembrokeshire will be directed to the existing network of visitor centres (of which there are presently seven across the county) as well as PCNPA's Castell Henllys site. In addition, information will be available via existing resources such as the [Visit Pembrokeshire](#) website, the [PCNPA](#) website and our famous [Coast-to-Coast](#) publication (with the 2018 edition hitting shelves very soon). Our Rangers and Discovery Team will also be running a comprehensive programme of activities and events to help visitors (and residents) to enjoy and understand the National Park's special qualities.

### Summer Ranger

In 2017 the Authority trialled employing a Summer Ranger in Saundersfoot and Tenby. The focus of the role was to provide general information about the National Park to the public through a mobile presence on beaches, harbours and at events. The role also focussed on encouraging visitors to venture beyond key 'hot-spots' and to build stronger relations with key tourism businesses in the vicinity.

The success of the role was reviewed at the Authority's [Operational Review Committee \(ORC\)](#) meeting on the 6<sup>th</sup> December 2017 and, following positive feedback from Members, the Authority will be employing a similar role to cover Newport and the surrounding area in 2018 during this period of 'transition' with regards to the Authority's building in Long Street.

### Ongoing Work

The Authority is working with Pembrokeshire Tourism to host a number of workshops with tourism businesses across North Pembrokeshire to better understand how we can collectively support the needs of their customers by providing visitor information in partnership with local businesses and the local community. PCNPA's interpretation team are also developing a refreshed interpretation strategy for North Pembrokeshire through consultation with local partners and have also recently updated the Newport Discovery Trail.

We are also very pleased to announce that PCNPA is a formal partner in the recently launched £1.8m ['Celtic Routes'](#) initiative which is funded via EU Interreg support. This joint initiative between West Wales and East Ireland aims to enhance sustainable economic growth by maximising the potential of the natural and cultural assets of the cross-border maritime area to attract more visitors and increase visitor spend - further information to follow in due course.