



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
The National Assembly for Wales**

**Y Pwyllgor Cynaliadwyedd
The Sustainability Committee**

**Dydd Iau, 11 Mawrth 2010
Thursday, 11 March 2010**

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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,
cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Lorraine Barrett | Llafur Labour |
| Angela Burns | Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives |
| Michael German | Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Welsh Liberal Democrats (Committee Chair) |
| Rhodri Glyn Thomas | Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales |
| Joyce Watson | Llafur Labour |
| Leanne Wood | Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales |

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

| | |
|------------------|--|
| John Cook | Prif Weithredwr, Awdurdod Parc Cenedlaethol Bannau Brycheiniog Chief Executive, Brecon Beacons National Park Authority |
| Aneurin Phillips | Prif Weithredwr, Awdurdod Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri Chief Executive, Snowdonia National Park Authority |
| Caerwyn Roberts | Cadeirydd, Awdurdod Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri Chair, Snowdonia National Park Authority |
| Mary Taylor | Cadeirydd, Awdurdod Parc Cenedlaethol Bannau Brycheiniog Chair, Brecon Beacons National Park Authority |
| Nic Wheeler | Prif Weithredwr, Awdurdod Parc Cenedlaethol Arfordir Penfro Chief Executive, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority |

Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Dr Virginia Hawkins | Clerc Clerk |
| Victoria Paris | Gwasanaeth Ymchwil yr Aelodau Members' Research Service |
| Meriel Singleton | Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk |

*Cynhaliwyd y cyfarfod yn swyddfa Awdurdod Parc Cenedlaethol Bannau Brycheiniog.
 The meeting was held in the office of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority.*

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 1.33 p.m.
 The meeting began at 1.33 p.m.*

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Michael German:** Good afternoon, colleagues. Welcome to this meeting of the Sustainability Committee of the National Assembly for Wales. I have to make certain announcements at the beginning to avoid any panic during the meeting. In the event of a fire alarm, you should leave the room by the marked fire exits and follow instructions from the

ushers and staff. There is no test forecast for today, so if the alarm does sound, it will probably be a real emergency and I would suggest that you follow the ushers quickly.

[2] If you have any mobile phones, pagers or BlackBerrys, please switch them off, even if they are in silent mode, because they interfere with the broadcasting equipment. I am the first one to be guilty of that; therefore, it will go into my bag, out of the way, although it is on silent mode. If we receive anything, it makes a noise, which distorts the recording.

[3] We operate bilingually in the National Assembly for Wales, through the media of Welsh and English. Headphones are provided for simultaneous translation, which can be found on channel 0. Channel 1 is available for sound reinforcement, should you wish to have the volume amplified. For those who are giving evidence, please do not touch any of the buttons. The great thing about the National Assembly is that it is buttonless: as if by magic, the light will appear on the microphone and it will be switched on.

[4] I have received apologies from Brynle Williams, Karen Sinclair and Irene James. Joyce Watson is on her way, as is Angela Burns. I expect to see them during the course of the meeting. There are no substitutes for Brynle, Karen or Irene.

1.35 p.m.

**Craffu ar Gyrrff a Noddir gan Lywodraeth y Cynulliad—Awdurdodau'r Parciau
Cenedlaethol
Scrutiny of the Assembly Government Sponsored Public Bodies—The National
Park Authorities**

[5] **Michael German:** Today, we will scrutinise the national parks authorities as part of our scrutiny of Assembly Government bodies. We will conduct this meeting in two halves. I have informed the witnesses that we will do it in that way, so it is not a surprise to them. The first session will concentrate on the strategic aspects of parks management, and we will then move on to consider more specific actions in the parks themselves. Before I begin, I will invite the chair of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, Mary Taylor, to give us a quick word of welcome.

[6] **Ms Taylor:** I welcome you all to the Brecon Beacons National Park. You have chosen a beautiful day to see the beacons in all their glory. I hope that you have a very productive and fruitful meeting. I now hand over to Councillor Caerwyn Roberts OBE, the chairman of Snowdonia National Park Authority, who will make the opening remarks. Thank you.

[7] **Michael German:** Before I ask Caerwyn to make his opening remarks, I would like to welcome him to the meeting, as chair of the Snowdonia National Park Authority. I also welcome Nic Wheeler, chief executive of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority; Aneurin Phillips, chief executive of Snowdonia National Park Authority; and John Cook, chief executive of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority. You may now make any opening remarks, collectively or separately, about the delivery of the national park authorities against the targets set in the Welsh Assembly Government's policy statement and your strategic grant letter.

[8] **Mr Roberts:** Yr wyf wedi paratoi cyflwyniad, felly fe'i darllenaf i'r pwyllgor. Yr wyf wedi bod yn aelod o Awdurdod Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri er 1987; cefais fy ethol yn is-gadeirydd yr awdurdod ym 1995 ac yn gadeirydd yn 1999. Yn ystod y cyfnod hwn, **Mr Roberts:** I have prepared a presentation, so I will read it out to the committee. I have been a member of the Snowdonia National Park Authority since 1987; I was elected vice-chair of the authority in 1995 and chair in 1999. During this time, I have also had the

cefais y fraint o fod yn gadeirydd ac yn is-gadeirydd Cymdeithas Parciau Cenedlaethol y Deyrnas Gyfunol am gyfnod o wyth mlynedd, ac yn gadeirydd Cymdeithas Awdurdodau Parciau Cenedlaethol Cymru. Mewn partneriaeth â'm gwraig, Bet, a Bryn y mab, yr wyf yn ffermio 140 ha uwchlaw Harlech, sydd yn y parc cenedlaethol.

privilege of being chair and vice-chair of the United Kingdom Association of National Park Authorities for a period of eight years, and chair of the Welsh Association of National Park Authorities. In partnership with my wife, Bet, and Bryn, my son, I farm 140 ha overlooking Harlech, which is in the national park.

[9] Yn niwedd y 1970au, yr oeddem yn un o'r teuluoedd cyntaf i agor gatau'r fferm i groesawu grwpiau addysgol sy'n ymweld ag Eryri. Tan yn ddiweddar, yr oedd rhwng 100 a 120 o grwpiau yn ymweld yn flynyddol i ddysgu am ffermio mynydd a beth mae byw a gweithio yng nghefn gwlad yn ei olygu. Mae'r grwpiau yn gwirioni ar harddwch syfrdanol Eryri, a byddant yn ymadael gyda gwell dealltwriaeth o sut mae dyn a natur wedi ffurfio'r dirwedd a phopeth a welwn o'n cwmpas, ac, yn wir, pa mor fregus yw'r cyfan.

At the end of the 1970s, we were one of the first families to open our farm gates to welcome educational groups visiting Snowdonia. Until recently, between 100 and 120 such groups would visit us annually to learn about upland farming and what it means to work and live in the countryside. The groups marvel at the sheer beauty of Snowdonia, and they leave with a far better understanding of how man and nature have shaped the landscape and everything that we see around us, and, indeed, of the fragility of it all.

[10] Yr ydym yn byw mewn gwlad fach, ond gwlad arbennig ydyw. Yr ydym yn ei gwerthfawrogi a'i thrysori, ac mae Cymru yn ffodus oherwydd bod ganddi dri pharc cenedlaethol. Mae ein parciau cenedlaethol yn lleoedd arbennig o bwysigrwydd cenedlaethol a rhyngwladol. Maent yn cynnwys 20 y cant o'n tirwedd ac maent yn rhan o ddiffiniad ein cenedl, sef gwlad o harddwch naturiol eithriadol. Mae'n wlad sy'n gyfoeth o ran iaith, diwylliant a threftadaeth. I mi, mae datblygiad cynaliadwy yn golygu trosglwyddo'r lleoedd arbennig hyn i genedlaethau'r dyfodol, mewn gwell cyflwr nag yr oeddynt pan y'u hetifeddwyd. Nid oes amheuaeth bod y parciau cenedlaethol yn wir drysorau yng Nghymru ac y byddai Cymru yn llawer tlotach o'r hanner hebddynt.

We live in a small, but special, country. It is a country that we value and treasure, and Wales is fortunate to have three national parks. Our national parks are special places of national and international importance. They make up 20 per cent of our landscape and they make Wales what it is, that is a land of immense natural beauty. It is a land rich in language, culture and heritage. For me, sustainable development is all about passing on these special places to future generations, in a better condition than they were in when we inherited them. There is no doubt that the national parks truly are jewels in the Welsh crown and that Wales would be a much poorer place without them.

[11] Mae'r tri pharc cenedlaethol yn rhan annatod o weledigaeth Cynulliad Cymru ar gyfer Cymru gynaliadwy, ac mae awdurdodau'r parciau cenedlaethol mewn lle da i gyflawni'r ymrwymadau a wnaed yn 'Cymru'n Un: Cenedl Un Blaned' a strategaethau eraill. Gall parciau cenedlaethol Bannau Brycheiniog, arfordir Penfro, ac Eryri fod yn falch dros ben o'r hyn a gyflawnwyd ganddynt. Gyda chaniatâd, hoffwn yn gryno sôn am rai o'r llwyddiannau. Yn gyntaf, mae'r tri awdurdod

The three national parks are an integral part of the National Assembly's vision for a sustainable Wales, and the national park authorities are well placed to deliver the commitments made in 'One Wales: One Planet' and other strategies. The Brecon Beacons, Pembrokeshire coast and Snowdonia national parks can be very proud of what they have achieved. With your permission, I would like to briefly mention a few of the successes. First, the three authorities have achieved level 4 in the Green

wedi llwyddo i gyrraedd lefel 4 yn safon y Ddraig Werdd, sy'n dangos bod gennym systemau yn eu lle sy'n monitro ac yn sicrhau bod ein gwastraff, ein defnydd o ynni ac yn y blaen yn lleihau.

Dragon standards, which demonstrates that we have systems in place that monitor and ensure that our waste, use of energy and so on are reduced.

1.40 p.m.

[12] Yn ail, er 2001, mae'r tri pharc wedi gweinyddu'r gronfa datblygu gynaliadwy ar ran Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru. Drwy hynny, maent wedi codi ymwybyddiaeth ynghylch materion sydd a wnelont â'r amgylchedd a chynaliadwyedd yn eu cymunedau. Mae ein cynlluniau datblygu lleol wedi bod yn ddarostyngedig i asesiad amgylcheddol strategol a gwerthusiadau cynaliadwyedd. Chwaraeodd y gymuned rhan lawn yn y broses o'u paratoi.

Secondly, since 2001, all three parks have administered the sustainable development fund on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government. Through that, they have raised awareness of matters relating to the environment and sustainability in their communities. Our local development plans have been subject to strategic environmental assessment and sustainability appraisals. There has been full community involvement in their preparation.

[13] Mae gwaith yr awdurdodau yng nghylchfa cynaliadwyedd wedi cael ei gydnabod yn annibynnol fel gwaith arweiniol. Er enghraifft, mae gwaith yr awdurdodau wrth iddynt ymateb i newid yn yr hinsawdd wedi cael ei gydnabod gan Gymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru yn ei gwobrwyon rhagoriaeth blynyddol a drwy'r gydnabyddiaeth genedlaethol a roddwyd i fenter y Cymoedd Gwyrdd ym Mannau Brycheiniog.

The work of the authorities in the sustainability arena has been independently acknowledged as being exemplary. For example, the work of the authorities in responding to climate change was recognised by the Welsh Local Government Association during its annual excellence awards, and there has been national recognition via the Green Valleys initiative in the Brecon Beacons.

[14] Mae pob parc wedi cefnogi menter cludiant cynaliadwy, fel y gwasanaeth sherpa yn Eryri, partneriaeth lonydd glas a'r pâl gwibio ar arfordir Penfro, a mecanwaith cludiant cynaliadwy bws y bannau yma ym Mannau Brycheiniog.

Each park has supported a sustainable transport initiative, such as the sherpa service in Snowdonia, the green lanes partnerships, and the puffin shuttle bus that runs along the Pembrokeshire coast, and the beacons bus sustainable transport mechanism here in the Brecon Beacons.

[15] Yr ydym wedi ymrwymo i ymgyrch 10:10 ac yr ydym wedi dangos sut y gallwn leihau ein hallyriadau carbon. Er enghraifft, mae Eryri wedi lleihau ei hallyriadau carbon 21 y cant er 2005-06, a chwblhaodd parc arfordir Penfro Oriol y Parc yn Nhyddewi i safon BREEAM 'rhagorol'.

We are committed to the 10:10 initiative, and we have demonstrated how we can reduce our carbon emissions. For example, Snowdonia has reduced its carbon emissions by 21 per cent since 2005-06, and the Pembrokeshire coast park completed the new Oriol y Parc in St David's to the BREEAM 'excellent' standard.

[16] Mae gennym enw da am weithio mewn partneriaeth gyda sefydliadau eraill, gan gynnwys y sector wirfoddol. Er enghraifft, yr ydym wedi gweithio gyda Chyngor Cefn Gwlad Cymru a Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru i gefnogi gweithrediad cynlluniau

We have a good reputation for working in partnership with other organisations, including the voluntary sector. For example, we have worked with the Countryside Council for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government to support the implementation of

amaeth-amgylchedd a sicrhau gwell rheolaeth o dir comin.

agri-environment schemes and to ensure better management of common land.

[17] Buaswn yn gallu parhau, Gadeirydd, ond yr oeddwn am roi pwyslais ar y pwynt mai'r hyn sydd gennych yn awdurdodau'r parciau cenedlaethol yw ymrwymiad tuag at gynaliadwyedd o'r haen uchaf i lawr ac o'r gwaelod i fyny. Pan fydd y gwregys ariannol yn tynhau—fel y mae'n siŵr o wneud—ni fydd dewis gennym o ran torri yn ôl ar weithgareddau sy'n berthnasol i'r amgylchedd er mwyn gwarchod gwasanaethau eraill; mae popeth a wnawn wedi ei ffocysu ar gyflawni ein pwrpasau statudol, sydd yn cyflawni amcanion cynaliadwyedd Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru.

I could go on, but I wanted to emphasise the point that what you have in the national park authorities is a commitment to sustainability from the highest level down and from the bottom up. When the financial belt tightens—as it is sure to do—for us, there will be no choice as to whether we cut back on our activities related to the environment in order to protect other services; everything we do is focused on delivering our statutory purposes, which fulfil the sustainable development goals of the Welsh Assembly Government.

[18] Mae'r union rinweddau sy'n gwneud ein parciau cenedlaethol yn lleoedd arbennig yn rhan o'n hetifeddiaeth gyffredin, yn awr ac ar gyfer y dyfodol. Mae astudiaethau wedi dangos bod gwerth economaidd i'n hamgylchedd. Yr her y mae awdurdodau'r parciau cenedlaethol yn ei hwynebu yw cyfathrebu'n effeithiol sut y mae'r dynodiad tirwedd yn cyfrannu tuag at les cymdeithasol ac economaidd ein cymunedau ac, yn sgîl hynny, tri philer datblygiad cynaliadwy.

The very qualities that make our national parks special places are a part of our common inheritance, now and for the future. Studies have shown that there is economic value to our environment. The challenge faced by the national park authorities is to communicate more effectively how landscape designation contributes to the social and economic wellbeing of our communities and, thus, the three pillars of sustainable development.

[19] Diolch yn fawr ichi am wrando. Yn y sesiwn nesaf, Nic Wheeler, prif weithredwr Penfro, fydd yn arwain yn y rhan gyntaf, ac yn gofyn, yn ôl yr angen, i John Cook ac Aneurin Phillips, prif weithredwyr parciau Bannau Brycheiniog ac Eryri, i gyfrannu.

Thank you very much for listening. In the next session, Nic Wheeler, the chief executive of Pembrokeshire, will lead in the first part, and, as required, will ask John Cook and Aneurin Phillips, the chief executives of the Brecon Beacons and Snowdonia parks, to contribute.

[20] **Michael German:** Thank you very much, Caerwyn. We will kick off with some questions. In this first round of questions, I suspect that we will have to have individual answers for the first two, and then collective answers for the next couple. Could you tell me what your funding regime will be for the coming financial year, from 1 April onwards? What is the nature of the contribution from the Welsh Assembly Government? Can you compare that to this year's budget so that we know where we are coming from this year and next year?

[21] **Mr Wheeler:** Thank you, Chairman. The funding regime for national parks is complex. We have a national park grant, which is a line in the Assembly budget that accounts for about £11 million of the collective expenditure of the three national parks for the next financial year. This is supported by one third by means of a levy on the local authorities. We have retained that link. However, in England, because the percentage is so high, the whole of that third is included in the SSA for the local authority, but they pay 100 per cent. We felt it better to retain the link with local authorities so that there is a degree of ownership. On top of those two elements, we get a whole range of grants from various bodies for project and programme-based activities. Lastly, we derive income from car park charges and other more

sensitive areas of expenditure. Collectively, that produces gross expenditure.

[22] The figures I have before me are for 2008-09, so they go back a little bit, but to give you some kind of example, the national park grant element varies between 42 per cent and 52 per cent between the three parks. It is generally just under a half in terms of net expenditure. In terms of gross expenditure, it is much smaller. So, we are heavily reliant on a number of aspects of funding. In the last financial year, we received from the Minister an additional grant of £150,000 in the final settlement. We do not have that £150,000 this year, although we had an increase in grant of 0.6 per cent. If you can do your maths very quickly, you will realise that we have had a slight reduction in actual funding for the next financial year beginning 1 April 2010.

[23] **Michael German:** So, there is a slight reduction in actual figures.

[24] **Mr Wheeler:** Yes.

[25] **Michael German:** In your paper, you identify the three funding streams that you have just talked about. However, I noticed that the other column shows a significant difference between the Brecon Beacons national park and the other two national parks. Is that to do with assets or the ability to raise extra funding?

[26] **Mr Wheeler:** No, I think that it is a matter of historical programme costs and programme commitment. That will vary from year to year depending upon our involvement. In our case, we completed the new landscape gallery in conjunction with the national museum in St David's that year, and we were the beneficiaries of significant P2P and Objective 1 funding for that, so you will see a significant sum of money there. There may be a partnership in Snowdonia one year or a major scheme in Brecon in another year, so it varies from year to year. The variations are usually around capital expenditure and major programmes or schemes, usually those that attract significant European grant money.

[27] **Michael German:** Is it correct that you are able to get European grant for the Snowdonia and Pembrokeshire coast authorities, but not for the Brecon Beacons authority, at least not the big part of European grant?

[28] **Mr Wheeler:** Brecon is not in the Objective 1 area. There are other grants, but they are not as easy to obtain in Brecon. The short answer is that, yes, in theory, we are able to obtain it but that, in practice, we are not. It goes back to the problem of clean match funding, which is a big issue for us. We were only able to do the St David's scheme because a number of previous approvals dropped out, being unable to make it. We came in very rapidly on the back of that. It might be a surprise, but we used P2P, which was the then match funding mechanism that the Assembly Government provided. The net cost to me of providing a £4.6 million building in St David's was about £260,000. That is the sort of limit that the parks can achieve because we have no basic credit approval. We have a line that now allows the three parks between them £500,000 capital funding a year. However, as you can see, divided three ways, that does not go very far on an intervention rate of about 45 per cent. That is preventing us from accessing convergence funding and several other funds.

[29] **Michael German:** If I were to come back and ask you in 12 months, is it likely that the other column would have dropped?

[30] **Mr Wheeler:** Yes. In Pembrokeshire's case, unfortunately, the answer is 'yes', although I am still trying to find match funding for the various schemes going on in the county which our stakeholders—the county council in terms of tourism and Cadw in terms of the historic environment and the Countryside Council for Wales—would wish to see parks involved in. The problem that I face, and I should think that it is the same for my colleagues,

is coming up with clean match funding to do that.

1.50 p.m.

[31] **Michael German:** You have identified a figure that shows a decrease in real terms in the funding from April of this year for the next 12 months. Presumably, you were asked to carry out efficiencies last year. How do you expect to proceed with efficiencies next year, given the difficulties that you will have with a budget that is less than a standstill one?

[32] **Mr Wheeler:** Obviously, like most organisations operating in the public sector, we hear the doom and gloom, and we are prepared for the worst eventualities—although, like everyone else, we hope that it will not affect us as badly as it affects others. So, we are constantly re-examining the ways in which we do things, in relation to the joined-up working of the Beecham and other agendas. We are looking for shared savings elsewhere, and running down some of our staffing costs. We are organisations, as you can imagine, that work through people. Without people, we cannot work. That means that people comprise a relatively large element of our budget. Therefore, if there are to be significant cutbacks, that has to be done.

[33] To avoid the difficulties of compulsory redundancy, should there be a major cut in one particular year, all three authorities have been looking very carefully at their staffing complement. I have taken out two out of five of my management team in the last 10 years. In the last two years I have taken out another seven posts, and we envisage taking another two out this year. That is around 10 per cent of my full-time equivalent posts. I know that my colleagues in Snowdonia went through an examination of voluntary redundancies earlier, and I am sure that my colleagues in Brecon are doing the same thing. We are doing it on the basis of looking carefully, when vacancies occur, at whether we can deliver the services in a different way. At the end of the day, we are trying to deliver the same quality and quantity of service with fewer people. That is the challenge that we face. It is a constant worry, but one that we are taking account of every day.

[34] **Michael German:** I want to look at the way in which you measure your reporting systems. The Assembly Government sponsored bodies to which we have spoken say that they are moving towards an outcome-based reporting structure. Do you report on outcomes rather than on actions? Is that how you report to the Minister and to others?

[35] **Mr Wheeler:** We tend to report on outputs, or actions, at present. Outcome-based reporting is a relatively new concept, particularly in Government and local government. Although quite a large amount of our finance comes from central Government, we are still local authorities. So, we usually follow local authority accounting systems. We do a considerable amount of outcome-based and output-based reporting for the various projects and programmes for which we are responsible, and there are a number of performance indicators. We also use Ffynnon for specific benchmarking exercises.

[36] I would throw it back, Chair, if I may, and ask: what kind of level do you think we should be basing our outcome reporting on? Are there particular measures that you would like to see us report on? What do you see as the important themes on which we should be undertaking output-based reporting? We already undertake output reporting in a number of areas, but, moving into the new area of outcomes, what would the Assembly see as the main areas on which we should respond?

[37] **Michael German:** Well, thankfully, it is a matter for the Government to direct you in this matter. We would advise the Minister, as that is our pathway.

[38] I get the sense from your paper that you have a number of policy pulls: the national parks policy statement, your annual grant letter, the 'One Wales' agenda. How do you

manage to balance—some people would say ‘square the circle’—the differing pressures that are put upon you? Undoubtedly, there are external pressures. What is your mechanism for dealing with that? How do you set out your strategic direction?

[39] **Mr Wheeler:** It is about performance reporting and performance management. To look at the top of our cascade, we have to look at Acts of Parliament, policy statements, strategies and so on that emerge, as you say, from all sorts of directions. They are generally rolled up into the main corporate plan, namely the national park management plan. That is the strategic, five-year-horizon document that looks at the park as an area, what vision we have and what role we see ourselves playing. Below that comes the annual business improvement plan, which is the corporate document for the authority. Part 1 of the document looks forward, and part 2 looks back. Those are the two main documents that we look at in that regard.

[40] **Michael German:** Is this an issue that all three parks have in common?

[41] **Mr Wheeler:** Yes. Within that context, we look at the performance management system. We are all developing specific local elements of Ffynnon and other data collection methods so that we can do that, and we also do a lot of survey work. However, those are the two fundamental documents that we use.

[42] Underneath that, we all have a vision or a mission—the wording is different, but it is fundamentally the same—and underneath it lie destination statements or high-level objectives, whichever wording you want to use. Those are the ways in which, in delivering the work within the organisation, we translate the business plan and the national park plan into one, two and three year areas. The strategic grant letter is the most fundamental link between the external and internal agendas. That is an important document, and one on which we would like to see a three-year horizon rather than a one-year horizon, if I may throw in that suggestion. Too much public business these days is done in single years, ending on 31 March or whenever, which is not helpful. We are on a journey, as most people are in this country, and a journey takes more than a year. You cannot divide some of the things that we are trying to do, particularly on changing behaviour and changing culture, into time periods of one year. It would be much better, with a five-year horizon on our park plans and a three-year budget horizon, if the strategic grant letter had a slightly longer horizon than one year.

[43] **Michael German:** Have you received your strategic grant letter for the coming financial year?

[44] **Mr Wheeler:** No, but we are expecting it any day, and it has been developed in close discussion with officials within the Assembly.

[45] **Michael German:** So, do you know what is in it?

[46] **Mr Wheeler:** Yes. I would not say that I know absolutely everything; we are waiting to see some dotting of the i’s and crossing of the t’s. Apart from that, the answer is ‘yes’.

[47] **Michael German:** Is it later or earlier this year than you would normally expect?

[48] **Mr Wheeler:** It is slightly earlier than previously. There is an interesting issue there. I would not say that it has caused us huge problems; it has not. However, if you look at the articles of governance and the memorandum of understanding under which we are supposed to operate, you will see that we are supposed to receive the strategic grant letter no later than 28 February in any one year, or presumably 29 February if it is a leap year. Also, if you look at the articles related to accounting and to levying on local authorities, which constitute the preparation of the budget, you will see that the final date is 15 February. It could be that we should look again at the relationship between those two dates the next time the memorandum

of understanding is examined, because they are obviously out of synch. We want to make sure that the budget, when it is set, is set against the priorities clearly identified in the strategic grant letter. We all know what they are, but they will not formally have been exchanged.

[49] **Michael German:** To conclude, where do the local authorities' priorities fit into the pattern that you have just described?

[50] **Mr Wheeler:** They fit in a number of ways. The two main ways are through joint working; as I mentioned earlier, we have two separate concepts. One is the national park, for which we set out a vision and try to get everyone to sign up to it. The other is the park authority—a body that does a small amount of work in relation to delivering that vision. Other stakeholders or partners are key. County councils are crucial in delivering a range of things that we would wish to see within a national park; seven for the Beacons, two for Snowdonia and one for me. Therefore, they are fundamental partners of ours in helping to unlock that area. We have an enormous amount of joint working on everything from beekeeping to car parking.

[51] **Michael German:** I sense that that is on delivery, not on setting strategic priorities.

[52] **Mr Wheeler:** That is on delivery. At the strategic level, the community plan—a new form of which came out recently—is probably the main area in which the national park and the national park management plan, which it has to take into account, are fed into the overall vision for the county. I would like to say that we have strategic involvement within the local service board, but that is not always the case, which is a shame. This depends on the model of LSB that is chosen in individual areas, and on the priorities. We feel that all LSBs should be marking up the environment, sustainability and climate change as major issues. These are areas where we think a national park can help; if a county has a national park, and it accepts that those are some of the major issues facing the nation today, I would hope that it would see the national park as being part of the solution, and not the problem. That is not always the case.

2.00 p.m.

[53] My colleagues beside me on this side of the table are represented on LSBs and work closely with them, particularly in this area of advising them and helping them to lead on behaviour change and perception, as well as on actual projects. Unfortunately, that is not the case in Pembrokeshire. However, the Wales spatial plan—which we have not mentioned yet—comes into play in Pembrokeshire, because, for its sins, that county is covered by the spatial plan, two local development plans, a community plan and an LSB; there are a number of mechanisms all working in exactly the same area. The relationship between some of these major strategic plans—community plans, LSB work, the Wales spatial plan and national park management plans—is not always clear. Within the Wales spatial plan area for Pembrokeshire, called the Pembrokeshire havens, covering west Carmarthenshire as well as Pembrokeshire, the national park has a seat, and I deliver both the climate change and sustainability module and the marine and links with Ireland module. Therefore, that is a clear example, within a wider grouping, of where a national park can contribute given its particular expertise and experiences.

[54] I have spent a little longer than you would have liked on that answer, for which I apologise.

[55] **Michael German:** I think that I have to ask you the question: would you value more clarity on this relationship in the strategic letter that you are due to receive shortly?

[56] **Mr Wheeler:** The short answer would be 'yes', and the long answer would be that it

might go beyond the strategic letter.

[57] **Michael German:** That is a very clear setting of the scene for us, and I am grateful for that. Leanne will move on to the next set of questions now.

[58] **Leanne Wood:** Thank you for your answers so far. I would like to go back to the strategic grant letter—the one that you are expecting soon, for the forthcoming year. I accept that you do not know all the detail of that as yet, but can you tell us what the priorities are, as far as you are aware, in terms of what you expect the letter to look like?

[59] **Mr Wheeler:** There is a letter, which is about four pages long, and then there is a series of specific tasks or priorities—usually about 12 to 15. Within the letter as a whole there might be 30-odd areas identified as priorities, and that sometimes presents a problem in picking out specific priorities. I think that those are quite clear—around sustainable development and climate change, access, social inclusion, community engagement and maintaining the significant improvements that we have made to the planning system recently. I will stop there, with five, but I could have gone on to mention affordable housing, renewables and so on. I could go on, but there is a cascade effect.

[60] **Leanne Wood:** Are you expecting the priorities for the forthcoming year to be any different to those for the last year?

[61] **Mr Wheeler:** We expect subtle differences and changes of emphasis, but no radical shift, because the ones that I just rattled off have been priorities, and will be priorities for two or three more years. That is why it would make more sense to move to a three-year cycle.

[62] **Leanne Wood:** On that point, I accept your argument that it would make sense to have a three-year plan, but what if priorities change? How could you ensure that your work would respond to changing priorities if you did not have an annual grant letter?

[63] **Mr Wheeler:** You need the annual grant letter for the setting of the specific amount of grant, so you would still need an annual letter. What we are looking at are those programmes that have a longer outturn period being given targets that reflect that period, instead of being told that they have to do x by 31 March. Some of them could be spread over three years. However, we would have to return to the generality each year in relation to the amount of money available, because it may well be that it changes—we could suddenly find ourselves with a 10 per cent cut. In that case, you would have to return to the letter to say what to cut and what to prioritise. One of the advantages of national parks is that we are big enough to do most things, but also small enough to change fairly rapidly, and we have shown ourselves to be pretty adept at picking up new agendas, and changing in that way. So, that is something that is built in to our psyche.

[64] **Leanne Wood:** Thanks. The overriding statutory purpose of the national parks is to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the areas. However, there has been some discussion in the past about adding a third one to promote the socio-economic development of the areas. To what extent does the existing legislation enable you to promote the socio-economic development aspect?

[65] **Mr Wheeler:** That has been a bugbear for years and I suppose that one advantage of my retiring next month as chairman is that I can be somewhat more outspoken than I normally would be. An opportunity was missed when the Welsh national parks were reviewed five years ago; we should have grabbed that. Not enough attention was paid to what was happening in Scotland, and too much attention was paid to what was happening in England. The Scottish example of setting up parks afresh without any baggage was a good one to look at. They have quite significantly different policy objectives.

[66] We currently have two purposes. One purpose is to conserve flora, fauna and cultural history. ‘Cultural history’ was added by the Edwards committee in 1989, following evidence that it took in Pembrokeshire, I was delighted to see. That was the first time that the human impact had been taken into account. The second purpose is to promote an understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the park. I have two directors, and I call the director responsible for that area the director of fun, because it should be about experiencing and enjoying the park.

[67] The duty is quite clear, but is often misunderstood. The duty is in pursuing those purposes to foster the economic and social wellbeing of local communities. The key words are ‘in pursuing those purposes’, which means that we are not allowed to do that as of right. We are not a housing authority, so cannot build houses; we are not a transport authority, so would have to use section 11 to provide bus services. That is a block. There used to be constraints in that we should fulfil that duty without spending any material sums of money and should seek to do it through other organisations. So, even then, we were severely constrained.

[68] The block on money has been taken away, but, given that our budget has declined in real terms, that does not matter anyway. My view, quite clearly, is that it is for the Assembly to sit down and look at this. I do not think that this piece of work has been looked at sufficiently hard. The challenge in Wales is to look at the role of the special quality of environment that we have inherited in Wales and the role of protected areas. What do we want it for? What do the citizens of Wales want it for? Is it wanted for enjoyment or for its economic value or whatever? Until that is decided, we do not know how best to establish a management regime for it. So, there is a wider issue.

[69] **Leanne Wood:** Communities cannot be sustained in the long term without the socio-economic wellbeing of the people who live in those communities being promoted and looked after. Are there any specific actions that you take as national parks to promote the economic wellbeing of the people who live in the communities in the park?

[70] **Mr Wheeler:** Yes. We try to enlist the whole town within the local development plan function. In talking to the community, we try to take on board community aspirations. It will be interesting—the Department for Communities and Local Government in England has recently issued advice on this—to see how far we take the sustainable development plan and change remit in terms of embedding that within the planning system, which does not yet occur. That may lead to housing being refused because public transport is not available. It is about linking these agendas together. We are not education authorities, so we cannot maintain the schools; we are not post offices, so we cannot maintain the post offices. So, again, you are getting separate agendas—

[71] **Leanne Wood:** But you are the planning authority.

[72] **Mr Wheeler:** We are the planning authority for that, so we try to maintain that infrastructure. We are involved in several other things, such as affordable housing—that is a major issue—and, in terms of transport, we have put on a great deal of recreation transport, about which you have already heard. What delights me is that the five bus services that operate in Pembrokeshire are used as much by local people as by visitors. We put money in specifically to keep those services going for the local community during the winter. So, those are examples of how we have tried to push our powers to use recreation functions to deliver for local people. There are many other areas.

[73] **Leanne Wood:** It sounds to me as though you do not do much in this regard in a direct sense, but work with other organisations to achieve those objectives.

[74] **Mr Wheeler:** That is in line with the legislation.

[75] **Leanne Wood:** Yes, but that is very difficult to measure in terms of whether or not you are successful at improving economic conditions.

[76] **Mr Wheeler:** There are a number of schemes—if I can bring in my colleague—that do that.

2.10 p.m.

[77] **Michael German:** We expect all three of you to say something if you want to. So please jump in.

[78] **Mr Cook:** Thank you, Chair. There are a couple of areas that I would like to highlight. We could hide behind legislation and say that this not a purpose, only a duty, and therefore not our responsibility, but the national parks are there because of the people who are in them. One of our responsibilities is to foster the community. The words are all there: the issue is what we are doing about it, as you say.

[79] One of the areas that I wish to highlight is sustainable tourism. That is an area that we really focus on in the three parks. In the Brecon Beacons, I like to think that we are leading the way in the work that we are doing with businesses within the national park. That helps to promote understanding and enjoyment of the park's special qualities, but it also helps to grow economic wealth in that environment. There are a couple of examples of that, the first of which is the geopark, which is the western part of the park, and the more remote area. We are part of the European geopark network. That is not just about the geology; it is about how geology has shaped man and the park. In concept, it is not just about the geological interest, but about how communities that live in the geopark can benefit from that. So, we are working with communities on how they can celebrate the fact that they are in a geopark to encourage more people to visit, to stay longer, and to spend more. That is one example, and it is part of our whole sustainable tourism package.

[80] Our sustainable tourism manager, Richard Tyler, has recently been successful in attracting European funding through the INTERREG project for a collaborative project, which is very much about putting money into achieving some of our sustainable tourism aspirations. There are three key areas to that, one of which is the creation of ambassadors. Those are business operators in the park that focus on sustainability, sense of place, quality, and the green accreditation.

[81] The second key area is green tourism. We have established a green tourism programme. Businesses can qualify for that. That is partly about them looking after their own housekeeping, but it also about spreading the word to people who come here.

[82] The third one is clusters, where we bring geographically themed clusters of businesses together so that they can share in the sense of place, share best practice, and collaborate on projects.

[83] There is a lot that we can do, and a lot that we are doing, without saying that we are the economic development unit per se. We should not hide behind that.

[84] **Michael German:** Aneurin wants to add something. I ask that you keep to the focus of purpose and duty, which are the points that lie behind the question.

[85] **Mr Phillips:** There is a perception that national park authorities, in delivering their two

statutory purposes, are somehow moving against social wellbeing. It is quite the opposite. In delivering those two statutory purposes, we are delivering social wellbeing. The plans and programmes that we have established in Snowdonia have delivered jobs and improved skills. We are delivering that directly. Also, we work in partnership, and we support other initiatives which are consistent with the park's purposes that deliver prosperity. For example, we will be supporting centres of excellence programmes in the park, and that will be about developing the recreational side of provision and enjoyment in the park. Gwynedd is the lead authority in that, and we support that, along with other partners.

[86] Through our Objective 1 programmes, we have been successful in creating jobs. Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful in our major bid for convergence funding in north Wales. It was a strategic scheme, including three areas of outstanding natural beauty in the national park and tackling climate change at the same time as creating jobs. Unfortunately, we were not successful. However, studies have shown that the type of schemes that we are involved in show a return in that investment made locally is recycled within the local economy. An independent study by Valuing our Environment in Wales showed that the environment is an asset to, rather than a restriction on, economic development.

[87] **Michael German:** Could you give us a note on where those studies are and what they are called so that we can at some stage follow them up?

[88] **Mr Phillips:** Yes.

[89] **Leanne Wood:** It sounds as if you are saying that a lot of your focus on socio-economic promotion is very much geared towards the climate change agenda. Do you accept that point? I think that that is a good thing, by the way—it is not a criticism.

[90] **Mr Phillips:** In a broad sense, yes. We are here to deliver sustainable development, which means the three pillars: the social, economic and environmental aspects. We are trying to ensure that those three pillars work together, so that there is a win-win situation, so that we get a benefit for the environment but also create job opportunities. That is very important.

[91] **Mr Wheeler:** The short answer is that we see it as essential that the national parks do more in this field. If we are talking about building sustainable communities in the round and national parks being exemplars of sustainable development, we need to be able to operate in areas where traditionally we have to find ways around the constraints. Therefore, we would see a loosening of those constraints as giving us the ability to treat this in the round, and therefore to deal with the three pillars. We are very much stuck with the environment pillar at the moment, and we want to make sure that we can also operate in the social pillar—which is easier for us—and in the economic pillar. In terms of linking the economic pillar to our planning role, there ought perhaps to be a link to the business community, job creation, housing and transport. Those are the kind of areas that we are pointing at.

[92] **Lorraine Barrett:** I am looking at community engagement and citizen-centred governance. A review in 2004 of the national parks published by the Welsh Government recommended more effective engagement with local communities. How are you accountable to the communities within the national parks for your expenditure and priorities? What reporting mechanisms do you have in place?

[93] **Mr Wheeler:** Our relationship with local communities is fundamental—it is a core purpose for all of us. We can only deliver our purposes if we have a continuous engagement with local communities. I do not mean consultation and in and out—I mean continuous engagement. There are a whole series of ways in which we do that, but we see working with local communities and empowering them as a fundamental part of our work. All of us have a series of ways in which we engage, including meetings, newspapers, the use of our website,

and, increasingly, electronic ways. When we talk about communities, we are talking about two types of communities: geographic communities and communities of interest. We are looking at hard-to-reach areas, so we spend a lot of time on the disaffected, disengaged and Communities First areas, and we are talking a lot to young people, and so we are using YouTube and Facebook and things that I cannot understand by myself. So, the way in which we engage is important, as it provides intellectual as well as physical access for people and runs into the social inclusion agenda.

[94] In terms of accountability, there is accountability through our committees, Assembly representatives and local authority representatives. We try to make ourselves accountable by having open meetings and open fora. We receive letters, obviously. We do quite a bit of customer survey work. For instance, we participate in the citizens' panel in Pembrokeshire. There are 1,000 people involved in that. We try to get feedback and to identify ways of getting that information. The local development plan process, which is the area that touches most people, is a major way in which we engage with communities. For instance, we arranged workshops and seminars for objectors during the last such process. That raised the number of objectors by a few hundred, but it is a way of trying to help the community to interface with our functions.

[95] That is a fairly long answer, but it is a core purpose and it is delivered by all three of us as a core purpose in slightly different ways in relation to the local circumstances that we face.

[96] **Mr Phillips:** To add to that, we have worked with colleagues in Gwynedd and Conwy on their community strategies, which translate into our park management plan and local development plan. We have a statement of community involvement, which is an integral part of preparing our plans, particularly the local development plan and park management plan. It is a very inclusive process, involving fora.

2.20 p.m.

[97] We have engaged with young people on their vision for the park, and some very interesting results came out of that. We have worked alongside colleagues in Gwynedd on finding out what people's needs are. In terms of our services, we have our own disability and equality forum, where excellent work is going on, and we have responded to that. We lead walks for people with disabilities and have also made contact with Communities First areas to ensure that young people from those areas are able to come to the park and enjoy it. We have worked with the Black Environment Network to ensure that people from ethnic minority groups are also able to come and enjoy the park. There is a raft of real engagement that influences policy and the way that we deliver services, and I am proud of the work that we do as an authority, which meets the core principles identified by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2007 for service delivery: access, respect, taking account of needs, the language and the complaints system. We offer a completely bilingual service in Welsh and English. I could go on for quite a while about what we do—

[98] **Michael German:** I am looking for principles, obviously.

[99] **Mr Cook:** It would be misleading not to say that we are probably the tail-end Charlie on this as a national park authority. I will not dwell on it, but this authority faces perception issues; we are all aware of that and we have to work hard to overcome it. I will share some of the areas that we are looking at on that. First, we have four corporate goals. By 'corporate goals', we mean the areas that we will focus on for three to five years to achieve our strategic objectives in our national park management plan. The shorthand for one of those is 'taking care of people', but it means working better with communities and the people who live and work in the park. Some good examples have already been mentioned. In the areas where we have started to do that, there is a far better process of consultation and working together with

communities on the LDP. We engage Planning Aid Wales to carry out some workshops so that community councils can engage with the LDP in a far more confident and proficient manner. Similarly, we have carried out a wide-ranging consultation on the national park management plan. That brought about some of those perceptions and it brought out some of the skeletons from the closet, which has helped us to start to address them, because if we do not, we never will.

[100] For one of the next areas, as part of our corporate goal on engaging better with communities, our sustainable communities manager, Clare Parsons, has carried out an audit of how we engage with communities along citizen-focused principles: what we are doing now and what we can do. We are now sharing that with communities. One of the areas involved that we are looking at follows the example of another national park, the Lake District, namely looking at a community charter so that we can say ‘We will work with you on this basis. You work with us like this, and, in return, we will work like this’, so it becomes an engagement process.

[101] Another point that we are looking at is the fact that there are 52 community councils in the national park or that have part of their area in the national park. It is difficult to engage with them all on an active or individual basis. Some that we are already working with have suggested the concept of clustering, which we have talked about before. Some of them already form natural clusters, so we are talking about working more closely with four or five community councils, so that we have to work with only 10 groups in a year. It is work in progress, but we recognise that it is an area that we need to work on. The key factor is that there are 32,000 inhabitants in the park and a maximum of 130 staff in the national park authority. We all need to work together to make the best of the natural resource that we have.

[102] **Joyce Watson:** I used to be a Pembrokeshire county councillor, which Nic knows, and I worked on what was then the joint unitary development plan, which Nic has not mentioned. It was just that—a joint development plan by the local authority and the national park, agreeing on most things and agreeing to disagree when that was not the case. Have any of the other two authorities—I now cover all three parks as a Mid and West Wales representative—ever developed a JUDP?

[103] **Mr Phillips:** In Snowdonia, no. On the progress that we are making with the local development plan, I am pleased to say that we are among the top five or six local planning authorities in Wales. The park of my colleague on my left, Nic, is slightly ahead of us. Therefore, there are two national parks among the top five or six local planning authorities in Wales making progress on their local development plans, and we are very proud of that. I hope that I have answered your question.

[104] **Mr Wheeler:** The legal joint plan is an unusual model. Ours was the first. I think that Blaenau Gwent and one of the other authorities are considering doing one now. We are not doing it the second time around. We are working jointly, but we do not have a full joint plan, which has caused some consternation. The first time around, we found that there were different priorities between the national park and an area outside vis-à-vis economic development or housing. If you proceed jointly, you tend to hold each other up on occasions. Therefore, this time, we said, ‘We have done one. All of the fundamental principles have now been resolved. We can do it separately, but still maintain joint working’. Therefore, all of the technical stuff, whether it is waste or housing, is done jointly by the officers and the two authorities working together. I think that that is another model. Therefore, you can have joint working without a full joint plan.

[105] **Mr Cook:** As far as I am aware, we have not had a joint plan. It would either have to be a very big plan or we would need seven of them. The key issue is that there are differences within the national park, compared to others. What is more important is that we understand

each other. We may not have a joint document, but it is important to understand each other. In one of our major constituent authorities, we are actively developing better understanding and cross-working from a planning perspective, but also across the board in terms of working with our partner unitary authorities.

[106] **Lorraine Barrett:** I sympathise with you, John, having 52 community councils. In the Vale of Glamorgan, I used to chair a joint liaison committee, which consisted of all of the community councils in the Vale of Glamorgan. I think that there were 20 or so. Clustering is a way forward for getting together and thrashing out the ideas.

[107] I wonder whether you can say something about any structures that you have in place to reconcile potential conflict between the needs of the users of the national park, many of whom would be outside groups and individuals, and those of the communities and landowners within them.

[108] **Mr Wheeler:** There are a number of perceived conflicts that happen all of the time within the planning sphere and elsewhere. The structures are ones where the authority, each year, looks down in producing its own business and improvement plan, and in reviewing the park plan, and looks at the areas that emerge. Therefore, the structure that we might generally have is the custom of holding joint meetings with a particular area or a group of areas. In other cases, we have used surveys, and we have gone out to use consultants on occasions. If there are areas that are causing concern, and if we feel that we have the expertise in-house, we will set up the necessary partnership mechanisms to explore them. If we feel that perhaps there is a data or an information issue, we will bring people in to look at them. I think that that will vary, but the mechanisms that we use will vary between the three of us. However, all of us will keep a close watch—monitoring, if you like—on reactions to particular programmes and policies, and public concern through a whole series of mechanisms. If issues come up, the most appropriate mechanism is used to deal with them.

[109] **Michael German:** Do you wish to add anything to that, John or Aneurin?

[110] **Mr Phillips:** Yes. There are various mechanisms, for example, in terms of access to land. We provide secretarial assistance for the two access fora that we have in the park. That is a great help in terms of bridging between landowners, farmers and users. We have annual meetings with the farming unions, which help. We also have annual meetings with the community councils. There are day-to-day direct links between officers and people who are aggrieved. We do a lot of extra work, for example, with farmers; particularly as a landowner ourselves, and as a water owner at Llyn Tegid. We work with farmers there. Therefore, we try to be a good neighbour in the way that we manage land. Clearly, conflicts appear from time to time even within partnerships. You have to be mature about it. As long as the direction of travel is clear, and there is trust, you overcome those conflicts.

[111] **Mr Wheeler:** Many of the issues relate to recreational users, either in relation to landowners or each other. You can find recreation groups that are contrary. We have developed a very sophisticated series of charters, codes and codes of conduct. For instance, the cliffs of south Pembrokeshire are renowned climbing areas in the spring, but they are also places where rare birds breed. Therefore, there is one there to deal with. They are two quite specific recreational interests. The outdoor charter and the marine charter deal particularly with the growth of marine-based recreation and look at the environmental consequences in trying to get operators to operate under a code. There is a whole series of those, and there is a raft of ways in which they have dealt with recreational conflict in particular.

2.30 p.m.

[112] **Michael German:** John, do you want to add anything to that?

[113] **Mr Cook:** I just want to add that I cannot claim credit for clustering. The idea came in a meeting in this room of community councillors talking about our plans to introduce e-consultation with regard to planning consultations, which was not going down very well. We are now having a far more productive dialogue as a result of the group's idea of clustering. The best example of bringing together disparate people who live, work or use the park is through our advisory fora. We now have one in the east and one in the west and they are made up of community councils, farming groups, users, for example, caving councils, and so on. They meet twice a year and they tended to follow a fairly standard format, which we felt was starting to become rather dry. As with anything, what is good now will become stale in five years' time. So, you constantly have to refresh. That is no criticism of where we started, it is just that we need to move forward.

[114] Some of you will have met our biodiversity champion, Margaret Underwood, who facilitated a workshop in one of the advisory fora to find out how to move forward and to make the process refreshed and fit for purpose. Themed workshops were one of the things that came up, so that, rather than having a general meeting with an agenda and so on, a topic would be chosen by the participants. We would then spend the morning or the afternoon focusing on that topic. In the past 12 months, we have held two of those workshops. One of them was on low carbon communities, which covers an awful lot of the work that we are doing with Green Valleys, which I am sure that we will talk about at some point today. The other one was on illegal off-road activities, which brought landowners, communities and users together. We held that workshop in Sennybridge, and we were unsure as to whether we were going to leave without needing an ambulance. However, it was a very productive meeting and everyone came with their own viewpoints. We facilitated and managed it and we started a process, which is something that I have been trying to tackle since I came here as 'director of fun', to take proactive views. You can take an enforcement view or an education view, but there is also a provision issue, which we teased out carefully. We are now dealing with the outcome of that and taking it forward.

[115] **Michael German:** Angela has the next set of questions.

[116] **Angela Burns:** Good afternoon. I will briefly talk about partnership working and co-operation between national park authorities and other organisations, particularly to develop areas of national interest. You mention in section 1.9 of your paper that the partnership model that you have developed really suits the integrated model of public service delivery. Can you all give us examples of where you have worked in partnership with an organisation to deliver something of value to a national scheme, and whether you have had the opportunity to develop any completely innovative approaches to furthering that agenda? John, you probably have the greatest need for partnerships than anyone else with the topography that you have, so would you like to start on that question?

[117] **Mr Cook:** We need to look at it on two levels. First, we have the Welsh Association of National Parks, and, secondly, we work closely with our constituent local authorities. I have a few examples on that area first. To further national principles, but also to achieve economies of scale and savings, we have a joint affordable housing officer with Powys, which has allowed us to develop that. That goes back to JUDPs and the fact that a person has a clear insight into Powys's affordable housing strategy and also of ours. That is one example. We also part fund a rural housing enabler in Monmouth, who, again, delivers on a similar process. We are keen to develop a joint planning obligation officer with Powys. For various financial reasons, that is not progressing as fast as we would like, but we are looking at other ways to do it.

[118] We do not have a specific advice resource within our own authority with regard to minerals, and we have a service level agreement with Carmarthenshire on minerals and waste.

That allows us to provide that function without the overheads associated with it. In the short term, we found ourselves without a building conservation officer, and a very quick and simple solution to that was to reach a service level agreement with Monmouthshire, which is providing that advice for us—although we have since appointed someone. Our policy is not necessarily always to say that we need a function so we will fulfil it ourselves; we ask whether we can do it in partnership with others. Does that provide a flavour of what we are trying to do?

[119] **Angela Burns:** Yes, it does. What about organisations like the National Trust, or the Countryside Council for Wales? Are you involved in major schemes working with them to serve a national objective?

[120] **Mr Cook:** I am sure that we do, and the minute I walk out of the room I will remember them. Could you leave that with me? I will do some checking on that.

[121] **Angela Burns:** Yes. I was interested in your comments about those key officers working together, because it is all about getting the right skills, is it not?

[122] **Mr Cook:** Absolutely. From a national park authority point of view, the joint management team of the three parks had a session on this, looking at how we can work together better in the future. For my sins, I was given that as an area to take away and write up. The Welsh Association of National Park Authorities Executive meets next week, and, at that meeting, I will present a brief paper on where we are with that, and the areas that we have looked at in which we can be more fit for purpose as we go forward. I could give some examples, but I am conscious of the time. However, that is an area in which we are distilling our work. One example is translation services: we all use them, so is there a more cost-effective way of delivering them across the three national parks, as opposed to going outside? We must also bear in mind our sustainability principles when procuring. We do not want to shut everyone else out for the small businesses that do business with us.

[123] **Mr Wheeler:** We do a lot of the same. We try to learn from each other by monitoring one other to pick up examples of best practice, good practice, as well as the stuff that does not work as well, which is just as important. We also do that across the UK, so there is a central Association of National Park Authorities UK body that has a joint improvement group, and we send observers to that to see what they are doing. England is looking for the same kinds of things as we are. The background and the governance may be slightly different, but the issues are the same.

[124] As you will be aware, because I think I have already given it to you—and if not, you will get it when we meet tomorrow morning—we have prepared a schedule to re-examine this, and that work cuts across local groups, local authorities, parks in Wales and across the UK, and other bodies. We are involved in a large amount of partnership working because, as I said at the beginning, if we are responsible for delivering the vision for the park area, we have to work with other people to do it. Our impact is so small that working with partners to unlock our vision has always been a major requirement. I have scribbled a list here. We were right at the forefront of developing the integrated land management project with the Ministry of Defence. Castlemartin was one of the first to be involved in that, and it is now seen as an exemplar. I have attended the central land command several times to develop that, so that is at a national level. With the National Trust, we have an agreement locally that we will deliver the path management on its estates, so that is a local example that I can throw out. We have a service level agreement with the Dyfed Archaeological Trust to deliver all our archaeological services. It makes more sense: it gets core funding, and we get an archaeologist for 365 days a year without having to employ one. That is far better. We have access to 15 archaeologists but, if we were employing them ourselves, we would have only one. We are trying to persuade the local authority to pick that up. We also have a rural housing enabler. On things

like local newspapers, I have one here—

[125] **Angela Burns:** Is your rural housing enabler shared with Pembrokeshire County Council?

[126] **Mr Wheeler:** Yes. It is a joint appointment, and we have a full, joint affordable housing action plan. We did that together. We share mineral planning. Carmarthenshire provides that for us, as it does agricultural advice. There is a whole series of these, right across our areas of work. We already have joint obligations in place with the county—

[127] **Angela Burns:** On the joint affordable housing strategy between you and Pembrokeshire County Council, is it a universal requirement, or have you taken account of different areas? Might there be a different level of requirement within the park as opposed to areas outside it?

2.40 p.m.

[128] **Mr Wheeler:** You are quite right. The joint plan does, in fact, have different percentages and different allocations for the two areas and within the areas given the pressure for affordability and the housing lists in particular settlement areas. However, the plan was prepared jointly, so the technical input and the database were done by one person. That is an example of joint working that retains the diversity of two organisations.

[129] **Angela Burns:** Sorry to interrupt again but this is of great interest, and I do not think that I am treading on anyone else's toes by asking this. On that joint working with all the county councils that you have an interface with, you have done it for affordable housing, but would you also do it for renewable energy? The skills to decide whether you build a wind turbine—all the matrices you need to do and so on—or, in Pembrokeshire's case, to consider water-based projects, need to cover all boundaries.

[130] **Mr Wheeler:** Yes. The director from the county council sits on the Wales spatial plan delivery board with me. I sit on the regeneration unit, and we are both members of the coastal forum. Most of the mechanisms to interface technical issues such as renewables, particularly marine renewables, are joint ones, and they have to be because each party brings different skillsets to the party. However, it is not just the local authorities. We try to bring in the ASPBs, such as CCW, as well as the voluntary sector and business.

[131] **Angela Burns:** Who drives that?

[132] **Mr Wheeler:** It depends on the partner. On the environment, we have one partnership that is delivered by the Environment Agency and others delivered by CCW. I deliver two of the Wales spatial plan partnerships. The partners vary according to the partnership area that you are looking at. It depends on whom the partners feel most comfortable with providing leadership.

[133] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** It is very interesting to hear who you are working with and which committees you are all sitting on. However, what are you actually doing on renewables?

[134] **Mr Wheeler:** We are doing quite a bit on renewables. It is an area of complete frustration. Under the sustainable development scheme, four of the current schemes are linked to renewables. We are funding the development of renewable technology in the environment. As you will know, because you have spoken about it, the tidal energy system that is about to be put into Ramsey sound as a one-year experiment was developed using sustainable development funding seven years ago. We proved it; he proved it, but where did he go to

develop it? To Scotland, because he could not get it through the Welsh Office. That is a real disappointment to me, because we were right at the forefront of developing that.

[135] I chaired a meeting of 85 people in the technium in Pembroke Dock three weeks ago on marine renewables. They came from Stockholm, Stuttgart and all over the place and, for the first time, the technium was buzzing with people exchanging ideas. I chaired it, because I was leading on the Wales spatial plan. It is about providing leadership, which all senior public officials need to do. There is one job to be done, namely the job that you occupy, but there is another job and an onus on all senior public officials to provide leadership in their area, where they can add value. That is one example. I was seeing developers from Sweden starting to talk to local developers and putting two and two together. So, we are producing things on the ground.

[136] There is a wave scheme at Marloes sands, a windfarm scheme at Castlemartin, and there is one being dropped into Ramsey sound. We use wind power for land management. Land management is about introducing stocking to areas that are under-grazed and keeping them out of areas that are over-grazed. Usually, that is out in the wild, so we are using electric fences powered by wind power to assist in that. In another area, I am using it for a camping barn where we did not want to bring in power cables, stretching across 2 or 3 miles of open space, so we are using a small wind turbine there. We are using it ourselves and facilitating others to use it. More importantly, we are trying to change people's culture and behaviour by getting people to debate it and understand it, and openly explore it. So we are right at the beginning of it.

[137] **Mr Phillips:** I wish to respond to the partnership question, and the advantage of going last is that you have a chance to make some notes. I wish to focus on five key partnerships that contribute to a national agenda. First, we have a joint agreed strategy to eradicate *Rhododendron ponticum*, agreed with Gwynedd Council, CCW, the Environment Agency, the Forestry Commission and the Welsh Assembly Government. It is a species that suppresses native species, so eradicating it contributes to biodiversity. We have made a LIFE+ bid, so we are looking at delivery with those agencies. The Welsh Assembly Government is a major landowner and owns a lot of the forests that harbour *Rhododendron ponticum*. Action by the landowner can contribute to biodiversity.

[138] Secondly, I sit on the Gwynedd local service delivery board. It has been a very interesting experience, and I commend Gwynedd Council on the frank, open and inclusive process that it has gone through in identifying its priorities for Gwynedd. We have had an input into that. It has two strategic priorities, one of which relates to carbon reduction. We are proud that the Gwynedd Local Service Board has identified an environmental objective as one of its two major objectives. As an authority, we are proud of our contribution, because we have demonstrated that we have reduced our carbon emissions by 21 per cent since 2005-06. That was recognised by the WLGA when we received a highly commended award last year in the Excellence Wales awards for our work on climate change.

[139] Thirdly, on the green jobs agenda, we have contributed to the Snowdonia Society in the voluntary sector, which has been working with the sustainable tourism initiative in the park to make sure that businesses are aware of the opportunities of being greener: you can be much more economical by being greener. So, work has been done with the voluntary sector.

[140] Fourthly, Plas Tan y Bwlch, our environmental studies centre, has a throughput of 12,000 young children each year. It spreads awareness of the threat of climate change, which is an important element of our response. It is an eco-centre, and it has been accredited for excellence in public services, which is the equivalent of a charter mark. So, it is an excellent centre and we would welcome more business from the Welsh Assembly Government, if possible.

[141] **Michael German:** You have now got two advertisements into your answer—well, one request for money and one advert. [*Laughter.*]

[142] **Mr Phillips:** I will finish, Chair, by talking about my fifth priority. It does not currently exist, but it demonstrates that national parks can deliver, and that they can make national strategies work on a local level. Rhaglen Tir Eryri, through Objective 1 funding, plugged important local gaps in the Tir Gofal scheme—and there were gaps in it. Unfortunately, it came to an end in 2008. As I said, we tried to resurrect it under the convergence programme, but we have not been successful. It showed how national parks could make national strategies work in the local context. Linked to that is the fact that some Welsh Assembly Government staff rent some of our offices at the headquarters in Penrhyndeudraeth, which brings in income to support the authority. That is gratefully received.

[143] **Michael German:** There we are: two out, and one in. [*Laughter.*]

[144] **Angela Burns:** Chair, I have just noticed the time. Would you mind if I left the rest of this, as I am keen to get to my other section in due course?

[145] **Michael German:** Fine. Okay, Rhodri Glyn can wind up this section.

[146] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Mae rhai o'r cwestiynau yr oedd arnaf eisiau eu gofyn am ddatblygu cynaliadwy eisoes wedi cael eu hateb gan Nic ac Aneurin. Yr wyf yn awyddus i roi cyfle i John sôn am y prosiect Dyffrynnoedd Gwyrdd ac am y cynlluniau hydro-electrig sydd gennych ym manau Brycheiniog. Cawsom drafodaeth weddol hir tua mis yn ôl amdanynt. Maent yn dangos sut y gellir gweithredu datblygu cynaliadwy ar lawr daear.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Some of the questions that I wanted to ask about sustainable development have already been answered by Nic and Aneurin. I am keen to give John an opportunity to talk about the Green Valleys project and the hydroelectric projects in the Brecon beacons. We had quite a long discussion about those around a month ago. They show how sustainable development can be implemented on the ground.

[147] **Mr Cook:** Thank you for the subtle hint. [*Laughter.*] I did pick up on that when you asked what we are doing on renewables. I was in two minds about whether to come in at that point or to pick it up when talking about more specific areas of climate change. I am delighted, as I could talk all afternoon, but the Chair will not let me.

[148] **Michael German:** I would rather you did not. [*Laughter.*]

[149] **Mr Cook:** Yes, I am sure. Briefly, we need to focus on doing practical projects on the ground. It is all well and good to have position papers, policy statements and so on, but if we are to lead the way and make a difference as a national park authority—and I will expand on climate change later—beyond national park boundaries, which is the key exciting opportunity going forward, we need to be doing things on the ground. I will expand on some of the rationale behind that later.

2.50 p.m.

[150] A key resource that we have in this national park that does not necessarily apply to others—although it is very similar in Snowdonia—is water. With that comes the opportunity to produce clean, green energy through microhydro and indeed hydro systems. That comes with great thanks to a small number of members of this authority, who had the vision originally to ask what we could do about this. Grenville Ham and Gareth Ellis originated the whole concept of the Green Valleys initiative, which is effectively about us helping

communities to make the best use of the resource in their community to help them reduce their own carbon footprint, but also to generate sustainable sources of income, which helps them grow their own community. What excites me and the authority about it is the fact that this is about us helping communities to help themselves. It changes fundamentally the model as to why we are here and what we are doing to achieve it.

[151] We have put a lot of resource into that and I am pleased to have done that. The Green Valleys initiative is a joint winner of the Big Green Challenge and it has now found itself with £300,000 to take that work forward. We are now engaging with it on how we manage that relationship as it matures. However, in a nutshell, we carried out feasibility studies and, at the moment, I think that there are about 80 potential sites within the national park, while 11 are operating in the national park. Of those, around 75 per cent are viable. Of the sites identified and examined in 2009, once those are installed and up and running, we will be supplying around 1,100 homes with electricity. At the moment, around 5 per cent of the national park's energy requirement is provided by hydro-electric generation. We are looking at making that 20 per cent; we are not that far away. I am not sure how much that is worth in money, but the figure is significant—I think that it is over £1 million in terms of retaining spend in the national park as opposed to paying it to energy companies.

[152] So, that is an example of the practical products that we are producing. The other side of that coin is that, as a landowner in the national park, we also have land on which there is water, and we are looking at some feasibility studies to develop our own microhydro projects that can then generate sustainable sources of income that will not compete with anyone else, because the market is so big. That will enable us to generate additional income to help us put money back into management projects that can protect the water in the first place.

[153] The final link in that chain, which I think is fundamental in terms of what it actually means, is managing the uplands for carbon storage and water storage, which holds the water that provides the supply for the communities. It is a very short cut, but biodiversity then takes care of itself. If we manage the uplands for what we need, biodiversity is a consequential benefit of it. So, we are not managing the uplands for biodiversity because biodiversity is an outcome of managing the uplands in the way that we want to for a sustainable future.

[154] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Credaf fod y model hwnnw'n un arbennig o dda oherwydd mae'n creu nid yn unig systemau cynaliadwy o ran creu ynni, ond cymunedau cynaliadwy. Yr ydym weithiau'n anghofio am gymunedau cynaliadwy wrth sôn am ddatblygu cynaliadwy.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: I think that that model is particularly good because not only does it create sustainable systems in terms of energy production, but it creates sustainable communities. We sometimes forget about sustainable communities when we talk about sustainable development.

[155] Mae gennyf gwestiwn mewn tair rhan. Yr ydych i gyd yn sôn am ddatblygu cynaliadwy fel mater llorweddol sy'n mynd ar draws cyfrifoldebau pawb ac, mewn sefyllfa o'r fath, mae'n gallu bod yn fater i bawb ac yn gyfrifoldeb i neb yn y pen draw. Felly, sut yr ydych yn sicrhau fod gan rywun gyfrifoldeb penodol am ddatblygu cynaliadwy yn eich parc? Yr ydych yn sôn am gronfa datblygu cynaliadwy a sut y gall honno fod yn fwy perthnasol a phwysig yn y dyfodol, ond sut yr ydych yn gweld prosiectau'n datblygu yn sgîl y gronfa honno, a sut yr ydych yn cyfrannu tuag at y

My question is in three parts. You all talk about sustainable development as a horizontal issue that goes across everyone's responsibilities and, as such, can be a matter for everyone and, ultimately, the responsibility of no-one. Therefore, how do you ensure that someone has specific responsibility for sustainable development within your park? You talk about the sustainable development fund and how that can be more relevant and important in the future, but how do you see projects developing as a result of that fund, and how do you contribute towards the environment

strategaeth ar gyfer amgylchedd Cymru? strategy for Wales?

[156] **Mr Wheeler:** There were a number of questions there. You said ‘you’, but I think that I will have to respond from my perception in Pembrokeshire, although I am sure that similar ones occur in the other two national parks, and I will let my colleagues come back on the detail.

[157] We all look very carefully at how we deal with cross-cutting issues, which include sustainability and climate change. Within my own authority, I do not have a sustainable development officer; as has been said, we deliberately made it everyone’s responsibility. We have a matrix team that meets under what I call a management team support group, which is a sustainable development and climate change support group. All officers who have some form of delivery involvement come together to check it. We check it in a number of ways. We have green champions within the authority—officers who have specific responsibility in certain areas, which might be refuse, waste, electricity production or car usage. We have a member champion who sits on that particular group and acts as the link between the officer working party and the authority. This figures as one of our major policy objectives, and it is tested and checked in that capacity. That is a very quick way in which we make sure that this agenda gets from the top policy level to delivery at the bottom, and we keep an eye on it all the way through.

[158] The sustainable development fund is now becoming more interesting insofar as the low-hanging fruit have gone and we are now into more complex areas. Each park perhaps has different priorities in terms of how it looks at the SDF. We have always treated renewable energy as a priority because of the potential that exists in Pembrokeshire for wind and tidal energy generation. I think that is exciting. One of the things that came out of the marine renewables event that I chaired is that the use of a small public fund that deals with core inception work and that is not risk averse is vital. For instance, I can put—as I have done—£106,000 into the tidal energy project, and now we are looking at a £50 million return on that. A number of companies that came to me, and that were talking to Dr Ron Loveland at the time, said that they were often frustrated. They said that if there was a very big scheme, worth more than £2 million, there were plenty of ways to get support, through convergence funding and so forth. However, if it was very small, or they were right at the start and were therefore not sure whether it was going to be very successful, there was no funding package. They could not get it. Perhaps the SDF principle of providing fairly small amounts of seed money and allowing risks to be taken in order to draw out innovative thinking, and to prove the validity of computer and conception models and to provide a nursery for that to grow, is important. There are maybe six, seven or eight techniums around the country, and they are fine. However, you are still missing that very small-scale start, the leg up that people need to begin with. Then you need hand holding while initial concepts are developed to the commercial stage. I do not think, in terms of the mechanisms that we have, that the hand-holding stage is well covered. There are, perhaps, lessons from the SDF that could be applied within the Department for the Economy and Transport. I do not recall your third question exactly.

[159] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** It was on the environment strategy for Wales.

[160] **Mr Wheeler:** We contribute to the environment strategy for Wales in a number of areas. We are only specifically mentioned in one area, which is social inclusion. As you may have gathered already, we do an awful lot in that area. Although we are not specifically named in others, we see most of what is there—the marine side, the land management side and the waste and pollution side—as areas in which we have an involvement. I would like to stress two elements. First, we are in a good position to act as test beds, models and pilots, so perhaps some new concepts could be tested through park authorities. They have the expertise and the experience to be able to do it. Secondly, we have a network of delivery contexts. This

brings us back to community engagement and the example that we gave of delivering some of the agri-environment schemes. Using national parks as delivery mechanisms and as test beds to develop new ideas would build on expertise and experience that is already there.

[161] **Michael German:** We now move on to the second part of this meeting. We have 30 minutes, and then I want to draw the meeting to a conclusion. The aim of this part of the meeting is to identify common policy issues across each of the national park authorities. We will start with climate change, and Joyce will ask the first question.

[162] **Joyce Watson:** Could you tell us how your planning policies are climate-proofed and what you mean by climate-proofing? Also, to what extent do you share your experience of climate-proofing with other organisations?

3.00 p.m.

[163] **Mr Wheeler:** That is an interesting one, and I have touched on that. On practical climate change, my colleague John was going to answer that, but this is specifically about planning. There are two dimensions to that. In terms of climate-proofing, it has to go through the policy generation, because the basis of planning is the local development plan. The system is plan-led, and you therefore have to get the policies into the LDPs to begin with. We have obviously got ours in, and it ranges from trying to promote sustainable transport on the one side, by preventing developments that exacerbate the use of fuel, right through to sustainable communities and affordable housing on the other.

[164] There is not an LDP approved yet. The first three fell at the first hurdle, as we all know. We are the fourth up, and we shall be going to the local inquiry in two weeks' time, so ours may well be the first LDP to get through. Ours contains an awful lot of sustainability and climate-based policies that are aimed at trying to provide a policy context for the delivery of planning consents.

[165] The second thing that we have done—I have a copy in the box behind me; I shall dig it out when I have stopped—is that the three parks have got together and produced a top-line policy document, which is sustainable development policy. It tries to get people to understand what design elements and construction elements ought to go into sustainability. That is done, and behind that, there are documents that try to translate that into practice.

[166] I touched on the legislative framework earlier. I accept that it can be used as a convenient excuse, but the difficulty comes at the coalface, as I am sure all of you appreciate. If we were to refuse an application because it would create additional transport movements and exacerbate the fuel deficit, it would be an interesting one to defend on appeal. It has been defended in England, where the policy context is slightly further developed than here.

[167] The announcement by the Minister in the Department for Communities and Local Government this week starts to build on the detailed delivery of planning policy to combat climate change. Authorities then, if you like, have an assurance that they can do that. We have started to introduce that, too, in validation, and I have a copy of that with me as well. We have now moved to the prevalidation of planning applications before they enter the system. That means trying to hold the debate before the application comes in rather than after, to speed it up. One of the things about that is that it gives us the ability to talk through with potential applicants how they might introduce the necessary sustainable development and climate change elements into the application before it is submitted. The earlier you can get to the original concept at inception, the easier it is to introduce new concepts such as climate change. You have real issues with behaviour and culture around this one, and we need to demonstrate that introducing these concepts into developments will not cost money and that, in many cases, they will save money over the whole life of buildings or whatever.

[168] There is a range, from policy to the advice to potential applicants, and it needs to flow right through.

[169] **Michael German:** Would anybody else like to contribute?

[170] **Mr Phillips:** Os caf, fe atebaf yn fyr. Fel y dywedodd Nic, mae gennym raglen yng Nghymru lle mae penderfyniadau cynllunio yn dilyn y cynllun datblygu lleol neu'r cynllun unedol. Rhan annatod o baratoi cynllun datblygu lleol yw'r asesiad amgylcheddol strategol a'r gwerthusiad cynaliadwyedd. Mae'n dechneg y mae swyddogion yn ei defnyddio i asesu effaith y polisiau ar ddatblygiad tir ac ati a chanfod a yw'n hyrwyddo cynaliadwyedd, gan gynnwys effaith ar yr hinsawdd, ai peidio. Mae'n cael ei fesur, felly. Mae disgwyl i'r cynllun ystyried hynny yn ei gyfanrwydd. Dyna'r unig bwynt yr oeddwn am ei ychwanegu.

Mr Phillips: If I may, I will respond briefly. As Nic said, we have a programme in Wales in which planning decisions follow the local development plan or the unitary plan. An integral part of preparing a local development plan is the strategic environmental assessment and sustainability appraisal. It is a technique that officials use to assess the impact that policies will have on land development and so on to ascertain whether it promotes sustainability, including climate impact, or not. It is evaluated, therefore. The expectation is that plans as a whole will take that into consideration. That is the only point that I wanted to add.

[171] **Michael German:** Did you want to add anything, John?

[172] **Mr Cook:** That was the point that I was going to make. Our local development plan has been subject to SEA, HRA, and SAs, as has the national park management plan. There are areas that we will have to bear in mind from a planning authority perspective as we go forward from a climate change perspective. Some of those relate to different approaches to waste, and rather than hide behind them, we are having conversations with the Welsh Assembly Government's planning and waste departments about how we make ourselves fit for purpose going forward as a national park authority from a planning perspective.

[173] With regard to things like Environment Agency Wales's prediction about the fairly drastic impacts for the water content in the River Usk as we go forward, we are going to have to look at that from a planning perspective in terms of abstractions and so on. So, the HRAs are there as principles, but we need to bear in mind the real impacts that we will face as we go forward, and some tough decisions will need to be made.

[174] **Joyce Watson:** I am pleased that you said that, because there are big issues and climate change is happening. We know that there have been huge issues about flooding, and, without a doubt, planning and flooding policies fit well together, and I have a particular interest in surface water management. You referred to the baseline data that you have collected in relation to climate change adaptations. How will you contribute to the development and delivery of the Welsh Government's climate change strategy?

[175] **Mr Cook:** As has already been mentioned, we have finite areas within rural Wales where we can be a benchmark for excellence in terms of developing things. Our approach to climate change is in three areas. The first is to get our own house in order. We could dwell on that, but that would not answer your question, so I will not do so. We can come back to our Green Dragon and carbon dioxide emission initiatives if you wish. The second one is to work with communities; I have touched on that, and we may explore that later. A key area is to develop practical projects on the ground, which can include working with communities on the development of renewable energy projects. The other opportunity is for us to have land management and landscape scale management projects. You talked about flood mitigation,

but if we spent every £1 that is spent on flood defences in the areas where there is flooding on carbon and water storage in the uplands, we may not have such a problem. I am joining Aneurin now in terms of making my bid for funding. For example, in Waun Figen Felin, where we are looking at peat restoration, there have already been direct impacts in reduced peat loss off that moor. We are working in partnership with bodies such as Natural England on Hay Bluff. We are the contractor, but we are using local farmers to restore erosion scars caused by fire in that instance; the peat was eroding on a rapid basis.

[176] I have touched on another area where we are already doing work through the local service board, but we need to do that to a greater extent. As national park authorities, we attract a certain kind of person to come here, who has an interest in the work, but also has a skill in it. Now that we have developed those skills and expertise, we should share them. If we were to take a protectionist view and say, 'We are national parks and we will keep the skills in-house', we would fail ourselves and the national agenda. Now is the time for us to begin to mainstream and take what we have learned and developed, and work with other partners. Here in the Brecon Beacons, we are doing that through the local service board. Through our involvement in the local service board we have been successful in ensuring that the second strategic priority of the LSB in Powys is climate change. I remember sitting in a meeting saying that if we do not make it a priority, we will have let ourselves and future generations down. Mental health and wellbeing is the first strategic priority, and that is fine. Having got to know my partners in the LSB, it was not that they were not interested in climate change, but they were not quite sure where to go with it. We started to break it down into bite-sized chunks, and one of the key things that we are doing as partners is to work with each other on how we reduce our carbon dioxide emissions. We reduced emissions by 30 per cent in 2008-09 compared with 2006-07. We can help the health board, Powys County Council and the fire brigade to do the same.

[177] **Michael German:** So that we have time to deal with the two remaining issues, I will allow you two sentences each—I will be counting the full stops.

[178] **Mr Wheeler:** We can learn a lot by working with partners, and we are working very closely with the Forestry Commission on the role of trees in the landscape in terms of climate change, water quality and water pollution. So, we are working with others as well as working on this ourselves.

[179] **Mr Phillips:** Ategaf yr hyn a ddywedodd John. Yr ydym angen cynlluniau strategol ynghlwm â'r tirlun sy'n rheoli'r tir. Mae llawer o'r carbon sydd gennym yng Nghymru wedi ei gloi yn yr ucheldir. Os edrychwch ar fap o leoliad carbon yn yr ucheldir, gwelwch fod y rhan fwyaf ohono yn y parciau cenedlaethol. Os ydym yn colli hynny, yr ydym yn tynnu'r plwg allan o'r bath.

Mr Phillips: I endorse what John said. We need strategic plans associated with the landscape that manages the land. Much of the carbon that we have in Wales is locked in our upland areas. If you look at the map of the location of carbon in the uplands, you will find that most of it is in the national parks. If we lose that, we will be pulling the plug out of the bath.

3.10 p.m.

[180] **Michael German:** I will be equally tough about keeping to the 10-minute rule for the next section, which is on planning. Angela will lead. If you want to ensure that you have an opportunity to answer, you must ensure that your colleagues allow you the time to do so.

[181] **Angela Burns:** I have a quick question for Nic. In paragraph 3.1.3 of your submission, you say that

[182] 'in January this year 100% of householder applications in PCNP were approved within eight weeks'.

[183] Is that 100 per cent of those who applied and got through, or is that 100 per cent of everyone who applied?

[184] **Mr Wheeler:** One hundred per cent of everyone who applied.

[185] **Angela Burns:** So, everyone who put in a planning application in January had it granted.

[186] **Mr Wheeler:** No, not granted, but determined within the eight weeks.

[187] **Angela Burns:** So, it was not that they were all granted. Thank you. John, I was interested to read about the work that you are doing with Powys council on doing all the planning within Brecknockshire. Can you give us a brief overview of how that is working?

[188] **Mr Cook:** It has literally just started, so it will be a brief overview. I would like to point out that, although we are excited to be doing that, we did not walk into that lightly, because I am aware that if you go back only 12 months, the performance of this planning authority in terms of its eight-week determination rates was poor. I will not argue one way or the other. We put a lot in place to turn that around. The discussions that took place with Powys about us working with each other came out of a direct recommendation in the Wales Audit Office report, in which one of the things identified was that we were a relatively small team and had had problems in the past when we reached a critical mass and could not cope. The recommendation was that we should ensure that we do not get into that position again. So, we approached Powys to ask whether we could develop a service-level agreement with it so that, if and when we got to that situation, we could call on its resource to help out. The response of Powys was that it would be delighted to do that and to ask whether the arrangement could be reciprocal, because, at that moment in time, there was a finite area within Brecknockshire where it was keen to do that. So, we have developed this as a model for testing so that we will have robust arrangements in place for the future. I could give you the details, but I am conscious that the Chair might cut my legs off.

[189] **Michael German:** It is fine if you wish to submit a note to the committee afterwards.

[190] **Mr Cook:** We would be happy to do that.

[191] **Angela Burns:** You have already dealt with affordable housing, so I do not want to touch on that, because I understand the point that you made clearly, but what other aspects of the planning process do you think that you can work on jointly with your corresponding councils? As a layperson, I am not clear whether, when you grow up to be a planner, you have to be only a national park planner or another kind of planner, or whether you can do both kinds of work, provided that you have all the guidelines to make the determinations. Is planning so very different in a national park?

[192] **Mr Phillips:** The planning function is essential to deliver the two statutory purposes of the parks. Parks are local planning authorities for a purpose, namely to underpin and ensure that those statutory purposes are delivered. I am a planner by profession; I am not a planner by practice. I have seven years of experience as head of service with Denbighshire County Council, so I have seen the other side. Many of the issues are similar, but the planning issues in a national park reach the national press, as you would expect, because it is a national landscape designation. My experience of planning in Snowdonia is that a great deal more care and attention are given to compliance with habitat regulations, the quality of design, and protecting and ensuring local distinctiveness, which are part of the Assembly Government

strategy. I think that that is right, and that there should be more attention to those things. We have carried out planning perception surveys through independent companies; in fact, one has just been released. It is interesting to note that people do recognise that planning regulation, if you like, in national parks is stricter. However, at the same time, they say that they expect it to be stricter, because it is a national park. It is a very interesting revelation in terms of people's perception of national parks.

[193] **Leanne Wood:** The idea that you are stricter is something that we would accept, but do you think that, in the area of renewable energy, things should not be quite as strict, perhaps?

[194] **Mr Phillips:** We have carried out some analysis of the statistics. Since 2007, the three national parks have approved, in total, approximately 170 renewable energy projects, which include solar, photovoltaic, microwind, microhydro and biomass projects, for example.

[195] **Leanne Wood:** Therefore, they cover the range.

[196] **Mr Phillips:** They are all small, really, but all are related to renewable energy. Of the applications received, approximately 84 per cent were approved, which is consistent with the statistics that we have on overall approval rates for planning applications in the park; that is, consistently over 80 per cent of applications are approved. Therefore, there is no discrimination, if you like, on that side. I would say that that is consistent with planning authorities outside of the parks. The approval rates of the other 22 planning authorities are very similar. That is because most good local planning authorities encourage applicants to seek pre-application advice, and encourage and welcome negotiation. At the end of the day, my experience is that the customers tell us that they would prefer an approval rather than a refusal in a shorter time. That is not to say that we should take too much time over applications, but negotiation on improving the quality of the plan and ensuring that the improved plan is carried out is preferable to having a very quick, cheap decision process. So, that is something to bear in mind.

[197] **Mr Wheeler:** We see our role in operating the planning system as a public service in helping and advising people to achieve their aspirations in a way that is acceptable to the public. We do not see it as an audit box-ticking exercise. In some cases, it is a matter of going back to the applicant and asking, 'What do you want?' The applicant might say, 'I want two more bedrooms', to which we might then respond, 'Had you thought of doing it this way?' I have letters on file from people saying, 'Thank you very much for the work that you have done. You opened up my eyes to a different way'. That is difficult to do within eight weeks, but the Wales Audit Office decided that speed was better than public service, and so we have hit the eight-week targets. It has meant that those discussions to try to work with applicants to improve or to change their applications have had to go back to before the eight-week period kicks off. That is why it has gone back to what we call 'validation and pre-application advice'. The onus is now there. We have always tried to persuade developers by saying, 'For goodness' sake, come to talk to us first. The advice is free; you do not have to follow it if you do not like it, but come to talk to us first'. Most of our problems come from those who do not do it.

[198] **Michael German:** Thank you. We will now move to our last section, which is on access and tourism. Joyce will lead on this.

[199] **Joyce Watson:** In your submissions, you emphasise the importance of the national parks for tourism, but acknowledge that there are activities that put pressure on the natural environment and the infrastructure of the parks. How do you balance the positive and sometimes negative impacts of tourism?

[200] **Michael German:** I encourage you to give short answers.

[201] **Mr Wheeler:** The short answer is ‘with difficulty’. To give an answer that is longer than that, I have already talked about protocols and charters, which is one way of doing it. We had an American method of carrying capacity and working out the carrying capacity, which is a bit too technical. I think that you do it by having people on the ground with common sense and experience, who can judge when that balance has been exceeded in a particular area and then deal with it, either through land use and land management methods, or by talking to the user through codes of conduct or by other ones.

[202] **Mr Phillips:** Quickly, we influence the branding of the parks. We have Britain’s breathing spaces, and we have worked with Visit Wales. Therefore, we ensure that the right image is given out when the national parks are sold. Secondly, we manage capacity, with things such as car parking and so forth. Thirdly—and very importantly, in my view—we try to make sure that visitors who come to the park give something back to the local economy. For example, we encourage leisure networks, working with local communities to ensure that footpaths start and finish in local communities, so that the local communities benefit from them, and also helping local people to attract skills in that sector so that they can be entrepreneurs and benefit from the tourists who come in.

3.20 p.m.

[203] **Mr Cook:** I will focus on something else: how we get people here sustainably. Beacons Bus is one of the examples that we have, and the latest figures show that something like 60 or 70 per cent of people who used it would not otherwise have come to the national park. That has helped people to come here who would not normally have done so. It is about mitigating the footprint, but the key area is focusing on things that we can do well. I go back to the issue of working with tourism businesses; it is about creating an understanding so that, when people come here, they understand what their impacts are. That key focus will help businesses and their visitors understand their impacts when they come here.

[204] **Mr Wheeler:** If I could have one sentence, Chair: access, and in terms of access and sustainable tourism, you have intellectual access, which is important—the way that we promote ourselves and convey information—and you have remote access, in some places, where you can let people enjoy things without physically trampling over them, and then you have access for groups that are disabled, or ethnic groups that may not be familiar with a culture of open access; so, access is not just physical, but includes all those elements as well.

[205] **Joyce Watson:** If you have conflicts arising, what takes precedent: the tourism, or the natural environment? I know that that is a nice easy question.

[206] **Mr Wheeler:** That is simple: the Sanford principle back in 1974 said that, where there is an irrevocable incompatibility between your two purposes of conservation and recreation, conservation comes first. That is the short answer. The longer answer is that it is our challenge to reduce the number of occasions on which that conflict arises, and to try to enable all people to enjoy the park for their own interests all of the time.

[207] **Mr Cook:** I would echo that. You cannot hide that principle—it is clear. However, we have to deal with conflicts, and the waterfalls area that we have is a good example—we have to ensure that we have a visitor management plan that helps to start to recover the special area of conservation as opposed to contributing to its further deterioration. That is about working with communities to enable them to have an input on that.

[208] **Joyce Watson:** The last question is: how do you account for all of this in your corporate planning, and do you have a strategic approach to conflict resolution? A nice easy one.

[209] **Mr Wheeler:** My colleagues are looking at me. You ask about a ‘strategic approach’—we are just using words here. A lot of our work is about relationships. We are human beings. We are talking about how human beings interrelate, and how they use things. The answer lies in taking that approach—looking at where conflicts occur and talking. Most of the things that I have talked about—codes, charters and whatever—are about the opportunity to get people to sit down to talk to each other. It is through word of mouth, and by peer persuasion, and by promoting the values that we stand up for—that is how we have been able to stop climbers throwing eggs over the edge, or whatever. It is about the power of persuasion.

[210] **Michael German:** The final word goes to Aneurin.

[211] **Mr Phillips:** As Nic said, this is about local context and culture, and being open with people about what you are trying to do. We have advisory fora, and my understanding is that, years ago, they were hotbeds of argument—but now we understand each other, we know where we are going, and we have built relationships over time. That is what it is about: building relationships between Government, organisations and the local community, and it takes time. You need to build that and work on it.

[212] **Michael German:** On that kind note of people being the important factor in making any decision, I thank all three of you for your contributions this afternoon. You will be sent a copy of the Record for review—not to change what you said, but to check that it is what you said. Thank you for your time in giving evidence today.

3.24 p.m.

Papurau i’w Nodi Papers to Note

[213] **Michael German:** I invite the committee to note the following papers. We have a letter from the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing on sustainable development indicators. We also have the Sustainability Committee timetable, and I remind Members that, next week, we will have quite an extensive private session to deal with the very tricky issue of canoeists and fishermen that we have been discussing, as well as other matters. So, please set aside some time for that meeting, which will take as long as Members want it to take. The next public meeting will be on 18 March when we will start our inquiry into allotment provision in Wales. We will meet in the Senedd in Cardiff bay.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 3.25 p.m.
The meeting ended at 3.25 p.m.*