

## ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

**Date:** Thursday 21 June 2001  
**Time:** 2.00 to 5.00 pm  
**Venue:** Committee Room 3, National Assembly Building

## THE WELSH NATIONAL PARKS

### CORPORATE PROGRAMME

**2002 - 2005**

#### 1. Background

1.1 The three Welsh National Park Authorities, NPAs, were created as free standing special purpose local authorities in April 1996 under the Environment Act 1995, with revised and extended purposes. Their core funding is determined by the National Assembly for Wales through the National Parks Grant which is paid in two forms - Revenue Grant paid to the NPAs at the rate of 75% of approved expenditure with the remaining 25% levied on their constituent Unitary Authorities, and Capital Grant paid at 100% of the cost of an approved capital programme. Typically, the Parks lever in an additional 50% funding through grant aid from European and Lottery funds, local agencies and partnerships, as well as from fees and charges.

1.2 The National Park Revenue Grant settlement for 2001-02 totalled £7,254,000, an increase of 11.02% over the previous year. Planning figures of £8,034,000 for 2002-03 and £9,034,000 for 2003-04 were indicated also. The three year spending allocation is warmly welcomed because it allows, for the first time, the NPAs to prepare with some confidence a long term programme of work.

1.3 The Capital Grant remains unchanged since 1996 at £660,000. This is now an unrealistic figure for capital expenditure and the National Parks have to fund much of their capital work from the Revenue budget. The NPAs believe it would be better to absorb the capital grant into the revenue grant and allocate one overall grant to the

Park Authorities.

1.4 The National Assembly also funds the NPAs to deliver the Environment Development Fund. £750,000 is available each year to fund innovative, sustainable environment projects which involve local communities in the National Park. It is hoped that this grant will be extended into 2003-04.

## 2. Our Programme for the Next Three Years

### Priorities

2.1 The foot and mouth crisis has brought home the vulnerability of rural economies, and particularly that of agricultural and tourist businesses. A sustained *rural regeneration* programme is vital and our proposals are geared to supporting this through new and shared initiatives. To fulfil our statutory purposes and to secure a shift towards a more sustainable future for the National Parks and their communities, priority over the next three years will be given to new expenditure on:

- **Improving access** - implementing effectively the Countryside Rights of Way Act.
- **Promoting Biodiversity** - implementing Local Biodiversity Action Plans and the sustainable management of terrestrial and marine environments.
- **Regeneration of historic towns and buildings** - extending historic town schemes and grant aiding listed and historic buildings to safeguard the distinctive character of the Parks.
- **Promoting understanding** - wider involvement of people of all ages through better information and education services, development of websites and extended communication.
- **IT development** - to achieve the Government's objective to deliver public services electronically by 2005.

2.2 These priorities, together with the unavoidable year-on-year commitments such as pay awards and inflation, will be funded largely within the planning figures for 2002-03 and 2003-04. They share objectives with other statutory organisations, depend on future joint working with other agencies and all further the National Assembly's priorities, as summarised below:

<b>Priority</b>	<b>Improving Access</b>	<b>Promoting Biodiversity</b>	<b>Regeneration Towns and Buildings</b>	<b>Promoting Understanding</b>	<b>Development of IT</b>
<b>Shared objectives</b>	CCW UAs WTB	CCW EA FC	CADW WTB UA	CCW WTB	UAs
<b>Joint Working</b>	CCW UAs	CCW EA FC	CADW UA WDA	CCW WTB	UAs
<b>Betterwales priorities</b>					
- learning				ü	ü
- economy	ü	ü	ü		
- wellbeing	ü			ü	
- quality of life	ü	ü	ü	ü	
- simpler government					ü

CCW - Countryside Council for Wales UA - Unitary Authorities

EA - Environment Agency FC - Forestry Commission

WTB - Wales Tourist Board. WDA - Welsh Development Agency

## Further Key Areas

3. The NPAs have identified also further key areas of work to meet service needs and the growing public demands which they face; these will require funding over and above the planning figures. They are detailed in the bidding documents but the major areas can be summarised as:

Activity	Purpose	Outcome	Joint Working
<b>Sustainable Transport Initiatives</b>	Partnership programmes to improve public transport and traffic management	Create a more pedestrian friendly environment, reduce CO <sub>2</sub> emissions and benefit local communities	UAs WTB CCW WDA
<b>Development Control</b>	Following Best Value Reviews, strengthen planning control and enforcement.  Progress Unitary Development Plans	More effective and rapid delivery of development control services, a statutory responsibility of the Park Authorities	UAs
<b>Farming Support</b>	Enhance agri-environment, diversification, and marketing initiatives, through advice, guidance and aid. Support Farming Connect	Foster a sustainable, prosperous and healthy natural environment and rural economy	WDA CCW EA FC
<b>Sustainable Tourism</b>	Develop shared initiatives with the tourism industry	Promote green tourism and understanding by visitors; contribute to rebuilding the rural economy	WTB CCW FC

<b>Monitoring Change</b>	Develop baseline data and monitoring systems in conjunction with other agencies	Produce "State of the Parks" reports monitoring change and measuring performance.  Identify key State of the Park indicators	FC  CCW  EA
<b>Upkeep and improvement of National Park Properties</b>	To improve visitor centres and attractions and office accommodation	Promote culture heritage and understanding of the Parks	CADW  WTB  WDA

2.4 The National Park Authorities are consequently seeking additional resources for the next three years totalling £2,112,000 in 2002-03, £2,986,000 in 2003-04, and £3,610,000 in 2004-05. The bids over and above the indicative planning figures are £1062,000 in 2002-03 and £613,000 in 2003-04.

2.5 Special cases for funding over and above the National Park Grant have been advanced also by Brecon Beacons and Snowdonia National Park Authorities, in particular:

To purchase a building in Brecon for office accommodation to replace the present wholly inadequate offices. Cost - £1.2 million.

Financial support to Snowdonia National Park Authority for organising and hosting the prestigious international Europarc Conference in 2002. Cost - £50,000.