

**Carwyn Jones AC/AM**  
**Y Gweinidog dros yr Amgylchedd, Cynllunio a Chefn Gwlad**  
**Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside**



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

Eich cyf/Your ref your rref  
Ein cyf/Our ref our ref

The Chairmen of the 3 National Park  
Authorities

March 2007

### **Strategic Grant Letter 2007 - 2008**

My officials have already advised you of the resources being made available by the Assembly in support of your work in 2007 – 2008 – details at Annex 1. I am now issuing this grant letter to identify the priority areas on which the Assembly Government would wish to see these resources being targeted in the year ahead.

#### **Strategic context**

**Wales: A Better Country** sets out the Assembly Government's overall vision for change as well as four key priority outcomes to be delivered. The priority outcomes are: helping more people into jobs; improving health; developing strong and safe communities; and creating better jobs and skills. The National Park Authorities (NPAs) have a continuing contribution to make on all four of these outcomes.

#### **New National Park Policy Statement**

A new Policy Statement for the National Parks and the NPAs was published by the Assembly Government on 19<sup>th</sup> March. The statement sets out a medium term policy agenda for the Park Authorities, highlighting your very important contribution to the sustainable development and social inclusion agendas as well as your contributory role in addressing climate change.

#### **Climate Change**

I will be looking to the National Park Authorities to work with key partners to assess the potential implications of climate change for their areas (and baseline data from the State of the Park Reports will be of clear relevance here). As part of this I want you to play an appropriate role in drawing up risk management plans for your areas and to contribute more generally to the Climate Change Adaptation Plan for Wales now being prepared. The NPAs will also need to assist in taking action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

**Making the Connections** - Beyond Boundaries: Report of the Review of Local Service Delivery (the Beecham review) was published in June 2006. The Welsh Assembly Government responded in November 2006, with Making the Connections: Delivering Beyond Boundaries, which outlined a comprehensive action programme covering 5 key areas, all of which have implications for the work of the National Park Authorities:

- Putting citizens first
- Working together locally, regionally and nationally
- Developing the workforce
- Efficiency
- Performance

As part of this agenda, the Assembly Government is currently consulting on the establishment of Local Service Boards to provide more coherent leadership at local level and to agree and implement joint action on key strategic challenges. I expect the National Parks to play their part in supporting this work as it is taken forward in 2007-2008.

A Local Government Policy Statement was published on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2007. As part of the local government "family", this will have some implications for the National Park Authorities. The new policy statement will succeed the previous statement, *Freedoms and Responsibilities* and will outline a strategic forward agenda for local government in Wales. I want the National Park Authorities to take full account of the policy statement in undertaking your community engagement and service delivery work in 2007-2008.

On efficiency, the revised *Wales Programme for Improvement* builds on the framework document *Making the Most of our Resources*, which the Assembly Government published last year. National Park Authorities, in common with all other public bodies are contributing to the drive for efficiency.

It is clearly important that this momentum is maintained and that your Annual Report and Improvement Plans report the actions you are taking on this front. Collaborative working can bring about efficiency gains - as the Park Authorities have already demonstrated in their work - as well as other benefits. I therefore want you to explore further the scope for greater collaborative working amongst the NPAs and with other public bodies with related or complementary functions – and to develop specific plans for collaborative/partnership working.

### **Specific Areas for focus in 2007-2008**

I continue to be conscious of your status as special purpose local authorities with clearly defined statutory purposes. Taking account of these statutory purposes - and in addition to the strategic issues identified above - I would like you to have a particular focus on the following priority areas in 2007-2008 :

#### **a. Corporate governance and performance management**

I want the Park Authorities to continue to explore ways of working together, both with the other National Parks of Wales and your neighbouring Unitary Authorities, in order to secure more consistent and better performance management systems. The achievements and initiatives of the Park Authority should be set out in your Annual Report and Improvement Plan.

The consultation on the arrangements for the appointment of members to the National Park Authorities has now concluded and I will be looking to the National Park Authorities to help

take forward, with the Welsh Assembly Government and partners, the agreed actions arising from this exercise.

The removal by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 of the spending constraint on socio-economic activity by NPAs should also assist you in pursuing an agenda which is very important for communities within the Park boundaries.

### **b. Sustainable Development**

The Park Authorities continue to be recognised as key players in the practical delivery of sustainable development and I will be looking for your Authorities to build on the good progress made to date by continuing to mainstream sustainable development principles and objectives into all your main work. I am also particularly keen to see the joint National Park Authority/Visit Wales initiative on sustainable tourism finalised and implemented to help secure an appropriate balance between tourism and protection of the more vulnerable features of the Parks. In this context, the National Park Authorities will wish to consider seeking opportunities to take advantage of the visitor potential of forthcoming major sporting attractions such as the 2010 Ryder Cup in Newport and the 2012 London Olympic Games.

### **c. Social inclusion**

I am keen to see further progress on the Action Plans developed in support of the joint NPA Social Inclusion Strategy published in 2005. While progress is being made on this important issue within all three Parks, I consider that there is more that can be done to reach out to communities both within and outside the National Parks and to engage more with socially disadvantaged and ethnic minority groups. In this context it will clearly be important to promote effectively the new disabled access projects funded in 2006-2007 with additional grant from the Assembly Government.

### **d. Access to the countryside/coast**

Building on progress in improving public access to the Welsh countryside since the introduction of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 in May 2005, I want the NPAs to maximise the additional funding being provided in 2007-2008 to develop new access opportunities. Specifically I am keen to see a range of projects developed by the NPAs on managing the impacts of large numbers of people accessing the countryside (in line with the Wales Environment Strategy target). In taking this work forward I encourage you to maximise potential synergies with the CCW and the Forestry Commission as they take forward initiatives work on access to water and on offroad recreational activity.

### **e. Planning**

I am pleased to note that Local Development Plan Delivery Agreements (also covering Park Management Plans) are now in place for each of the NPA. Full and early community engagement in plan preparation will clearly inform the policies underpinning planning decisions made by each Authority. The reforms also seek the continued improvement of development control as an open, efficient service providing sound, consistent decisions in which communities can have confidence. It is also clearly essential that all aspects of your work here are underpinned by continued provision of training and development to enhance member and officer skills.

Planning – working with business - related to this is the need to continue to ensure that the NPAs are fully responsive to the needs of business. I know there is already much good practice on customer service in this area – and I am keen for you to work with CCW on licensing and other consents work in order to share and highlight good practice on customer service.

## **Mainstreaming**

The Welsh Assembly Government's duties towards sustainable development, equality, partnership working and promoting the Welsh Language should continue to be mainstreamed into the way you do your business, including through your estate management, procurement process and programme activities. Specific progress in these areas can be usefully covered in your annual reports.

## **Next steps**

Reflecting the above strategic issues, I have identified in the annex to this letter the priority objectives/targets which I want the Park Authorities to deliver in 2007 – 2008. In line with the current arrangements I would be grateful if you could arrange for the Assembly Government to receive brief six monthly reports on progress against these priority objectives (in October 2007 and in April 2008). These will again be used as the basis for meetings between you and the Assembly Government to discuss developments on this strategic agenda and related resource issues – and will form a key part of our mutual efforts to secure strong and effective relationships between the NPAs and the Assembly Government.

**Carwyn Jones AM**

**National Park Authority Resources 2007-2008**

Snowdonia National Park - £4,350,294 (£5,800,392 with the levy);

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park - £3,396,579 (£4,528,772 with the levy);

Brecon Beacons National Park - £3,232,127 (£4,309,503 with the levy).

## **Priority Objectives 2007 - 2008**

### **Corporate Governance**

1. All three National Park Authorities to have a draft National Park Management Plan in place by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008.
2. To work with the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association to agree a new standard selection process for the appointment of Local Authority Members by the end of September 2007.

### **Sustainable Development**

3. The three National Park Authorities to implement within their areas any agreed changes arising from the 2006- 2007 evaluation of the Sustainable Development Fund.
4. Work with the Welsh AONBs and the CCW to raise the profile of the Sustainable Development Fund (for example through a joint promotional event by October 2007) and, by 31<sup>st</sup> July 2007, work with the CCW to provide accurate data for the developing SDF database.

### **Sustainable transport**

5. Work with neighbouring Unitary Authorities to review existing transport arrangements in the three National Parks and, by 31<sup>th</sup> July 2007 identify opportunities for new (long term) sustainable transport initiatives, identify costs and set a timetable for implementation and promotion.

### **Social Inclusion**

6. Consider how the current shadowing and mentoring arrangements aimed at under-represented groups in the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority may be best replicated in the Pembrokeshire Coast and Snowdonia National Park Authorities - by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008.

### **Affordable Housing**

7. Work collaboratively with the unitary authorities, registered social landlords and rural housing enablers to identify two new opportunities in each Park to secure new affordable housing - by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008.

### **Access**

8. Utilising the additional resources being provided in 2007 - 2008, each National Park Authority to develop at least 3 pilot projects, by 30<sup>th</sup> September 2007, focusing on the management of large numbers of people accessing the countryside (including possible projects on access to water for recreational activities, sustainable off-roading, etc).

### **Access to the coast**

9. By 30<sup>th</sup> April 2007, the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority and the Snowdonia National Park Authority to bid for resources from the Countryside Council for Wales in support of the Welsh Assembly Government's agenda to improve access to the Welsh coast (possibly in conjunction with constituent local authorities).

### **Nature conservation**

10. The National Park Authorities to work with the CCW and the Welsh Assembly Government to develop a system to measure the condition of designated conservation sites and, by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008, agree the actions required to bring these sites into favourable management.

### **Planning**

11. The National Park Authorities to have Local Development Plan Orders, where relevant, in place by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2007 and to meet Delivery Agreement timetables.

### **Individual Park Targets**

#### **Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority**

Work with the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure that local interests, including Pembrokeshire County Council, are consulted, by the end of July 2007, on proposals to increase the number of members on the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority from 15 to 18.

**Snowdonia National Park Authority**

Snowdon Summit - Ensure that the £2million committed to the Snowdon Summit project by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2007-2008 is fully utilised and that financial and other risks are properly managed.

By 31<sup>st</sup> December 2007, ensure that Plas Tan y Bwlch obtains eco centre accreditation and obtains the Charter Mark Standard.

**Brecon Beacons National Park Authority**

By 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008, conclude corporate governance review explaining how better service delivery for the citizen will be secured.