

Date	July 4th 2001, 10.00 am to 12.55 pm
Venue	Fishguard High School, Fishguard, Pembroekshire
Title	Review of the Welsh Language

Presentation by Nic Wheeler, Chief Executive (National Park Officer), Pembroekshire Coast National Park

1. Introduction: Setting the scene in Pembroekshire

To quote Lord Gordon Parry "there are those of us in Pembroekshire who speak English, there are those of us who speak Welsh, and the rest of us who speak neither!" This sums up the rich cultural heritage and unique, local cultural distinctiveness of our County. The first, primary purpose of a National Park Authority is to conserve and enhance, not only the special landscape and wildlife qualities of the area, but also the cultural ones - a dimension added in the 1995 Environment Act as a direct response to representations made by this National Park during the evidence gathering sessions of the National Parks Review Committee. This reflects the Parks' view that it is the people, as well as the place, that forms our rich heritage, and indeed the place has itself been fashioned by the people who have lived and worked it over the centuries.

As well as the need to respect the differences of background and outlook that exist across Pembroekshire, we believe that culture is wider than just the language, and is also about the culture which goes with the language.

2. Signing up to the vision

The National Park has long shared the primary objective, the vision if you like, of enabling people to use whichever language they are most comfortable with. This equality of opportunity must remain at the heart of policy. Indeed in 1996 the Park Authority was the very first public organisation in Pembroekshire to respond to the requirements of the Welsh Language Act 1993 and produce a specific Welsh Language Scheme, during its first year as a free-standing special purpose local authority. The Authority has given an unequivocal commitment to promoting the use of the Welsh Language in its work, and throughout Pembroekshire, and to conserving the language as a major component of the cultural heritage of Pembroekshire. This is enshrined in our strategic, corporate management plan, and in planning documents like the emerging Unitary Development Plan.

3. Aware of the practicalities

Signing up to a vision is one thing, implementing it in practice is quite another. In organisations and areas

which do not enjoy a long tradition of bilingual communications, the introduction of a comprehensive bilingual policy can impose difficulties. In an obvious sense, there will be additional costs and staff time involved. There will be practical challenges - and opportunities - in delivering a bilingual policy in operating circumstances. There will be a requirement for training and familiarisation. There will be a challenge of ownership - gaining acceptance and support to promote a new way of thinking, and a new way of working. For instance, our internal staff guidance note provides really good practical advice for staff on a bilingual approach in the workplace. Time however does not allow me to examine the detail, although I am happy to respond to questions or to provide evidence of the experience of my own Authority as it has travelled down the road of implementation.

4. Conclusion: Promoting inclusivity

To end where I began, there is an absolute need for any Welsh Language Policy to be inclusive - positive - encouraging - voluntary - and above all - sensitive, and to be seen to be all these things. The policy and its implementation must carry the whole of Welsh society with it, and not just a select part, it must build ownership in the true sense of the word, and not just dictate, or seek to impose from above, if we are really to achieve a truly sustainable, living, bilingual community. The challenge of achieving this in Pembrokeshire with its rich cultural diversity, all of which is equally deserving of protection will perhaps reflect the wider challenge throughout Wales as a whole.

Nic Wheeler, Chief Executive (National Park Officer)

June 2001