

JOINT REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PARK DIRECTION AND HEAD OF PARK DELIVERY

SUBJECT: OUTCOMES ACHIEVED BY REORGANISING HOW WE DELIVER PARK PURPOSES

Purpose of this report

1. This report considers what the outcomes have been from the Authority's re-organisation of how practical land conservation, public rights of way and countryside access and archaeology work is done by the Authority. It highlights benefits and identifies where issues still need to be addressed under the current structure and approach adopted.

Background

2. The National Park Authority has many roles: these include nature conservation work on almost 120 sites throughout the National Park and Pembrokeshire, management of the 299km Pembrokeshire Coast Path National Trail and 850km inland rights of way, management of car parks and picnic sites, management of the Cilrhedyn Woodland Centre and management of visitor experiences at Carew Castle and Tidal Mill and Castell Henllys.
3. Prior to reorganisation in 2011-12, there was a degree of separation between conservation and recreation work programmes. Reorganisation in 2011/12 included moving all the warden teams to a new directorate, Park Delivery, while work programming for conservation, rights of way and archaeology was centralised the Park Direction directorate.
4. Park Delivery warden staff, are based within one of three geographical sectors (North, West and South/Daugleddau, coinciding with the Ranger areas). The Area Warden teams are led by an Area Warden Manager. Annex 2 and 3 provides details of time commitments of the Area Warden Teams, in each geographical area and a commentary on the tasks achieved during 2013-2014.
5. The Carew Castle and Castell Henllys wardens were also incorporated into the Park Delivery area teams. The work programmes for Carew and Castell Henllys are agreed locally with site managers and the Coast Path work programme is generated by the National Trail Officer who is part of the Delivery Team. (Work on the Coast Path is reported annually through a National Trail Steering Group and annual report to NRW who provide the majority of funding.)

Outcomes

1. **Monitoring of Outcomes:** Park Direction has been able to improve administrative systems, including monitoring of conservation results, thereby improving the Authority's effectiveness, efficiency and accountability. Annex 1 provides a summary commentary on achievements for our land management programme for 2013-2014. Work is carried out by both wardens and land owners and contractors.
2. For the monitoring period of 2013 to 2014 approximately 69% of the sites under active conservation management were judged to be of "Green" status.¹ The remaining 31% of the sites visited were judged to be of "Amber" status; this is because many sites are at the beginning of their management. None of the sites audited during the 2013/2014 monitoring period were given a red status. There can be influences that the work programming has no control over, such as the weather, but by in large the outcomes have been positive.
3. The Countryside Access Management database for PROW is now established to record survey data. The database is being customised by Park Direction in order to issue tasks and work programmes, generate reports and monitor performance of Delivery's role in PROW management.
4. **Greater resilience for service delivery:** Staff training and aggregation of the conservation and recreation work programmes has meant that more wardens are now able to carry out conservation work. This means in turn that the work can be profiled more efficiently throughout the year and throughout the National Park. It also means that gaps due to staff sickness can be more easily covered.

¹ Red

A site is judged to be "Red" where agreed management is not in practice and where damaging activities have taken place, and where the habitats are unable to support the desired species. In this scenario the Authority will make a judgement on whether or not to continue involvement with the site following discussion with the land owner.

Amber

A site can be judged to be amber where issues exist with the management of the site and/or where the ecology of the site has not yet improved to the desired level. A proportion of the sites that the authority is involved with are of amber status; this is usually because the site is still in the recovery stage, but heading towards green status.

It is also important to point out that the results of management are influenced by environmental conditions, particularly climate. Whilst a site may not be achieving ideal results for particular species (e.g. because of an unseasonably wet summer) it may still provide good quality functional ecosystems/habitats. These are then in ideal condition for when environmental conditions improve and the species in question can recover again.

Green

A site is judged to be "Green" where management has been successfully implemented according to an agreement with the land owner and where a site is deemed to be in good ecological condition i.e. where ecosystems are functioning and supporting species expected on the site.

5. **Enhanced Skills set:** Wardens themselves have improved their range of skills and their work is more varied. There remains difficulties when ecological support and advice is needed on site and the Ecologist or Woodland Officer is not always able to be on hand to advise. One of the changes that is taking place is the employment of a Biodiversity Officer for the Authority who will take on, in part, some of the duties of the Ecologist and Woodlands Officer who are retiring. The new priorities for the job will mean that there will be more time to provide on-site support where needed.
6. **Area Team approach:** The new warden teams had to learn additional land management skills and widen their areas of work so that they became more flexible. When one specialist team worked across the whole Park they were able to manage with one set of specialised equipment – when there were three teams doing the same job, they either had to share equipment with consequent travel time loss, buy more equipment or use less-than-ideal machinery.
7. There is concern that staffing levels in the three Area Warden Teams needs to be considered in order to ensure that PROW condition survey is undertaken and that there is adequate capacity for maintenance of PROW in the longer term.
8. **Corporate Priorities:** The arrangements have provided an opportunity to make direct judgements to be made in allocating resources to conservation and recreation goals, although they can often be mutually beneficial. Pie chart 4 in Annex 2 provides a ready reckoner on the allocation of warden resources last year. This should also prove helpful in understanding what resources the Authority is using to deliver Park purposes on the ground in times of budget change. The second part of Annex 2 explains something of what is involved in each area of work and some of the constraints to changing time and resource allocation.
9. **Improvements to our approach to grazing:** With the benefit of input from the warden team there have been improvements made to the way in which the Authority organises grazing. This includes our approach to animal transportation and welfare, site assessments prior to putting stock on land and defining the responsibilities of the various parties to the agreements to graze.
10. **Splitting up commissioning:** Splitting the originator of the work programme from the line manager of the team originally led to frustration in that work had to be explained much more fully and work programmes much better defined. This led to a significant amount of additional paperwork in relation to the land management conservation programme and initially led to problems of communication across directorates, and problems in implementation. This has by in large been resolved through a combination of familiarisation with the sites and by agreeing a work programme generated using a new database system prepared by IT. In practice the data in Annex 2 show that the great majority of the commissioned work has been completed as planned.

11. Programming work for the maintaining the priority network of public rights of way was an easier task (90% of the network) as the Warden teams were more than familiar with what was expected of them. Direction commissions achievable work programmes for Delivery both in terms of maintenance of accessible network (1127 routes; 735 km) and improvements of obstructed routes (32 routes; 21km). However, since re-organisation communication and record keeping needs improving with regard to PROW complaints.

12. Conditions Survey of Footpaths: A rolling PROW condition survey designed to inspect and record the condition of entire PROW network in the National Park over a three year period is underway. (Formal condition survey previously only operated in South area of National Park). Condition surveys will form the basis for future work programmes and ensure that National Park Authority can demonstrate that it is competently maintaining a safe network of PROW.

13. The Authority is **seeking to achieve a new performance indicator (PI) for PROW** jointly adopted with the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority in 2012. Park Delivery is making good progress to ensure that the entire accessible network meets the PI which entails all paths being signposted and easy to use.

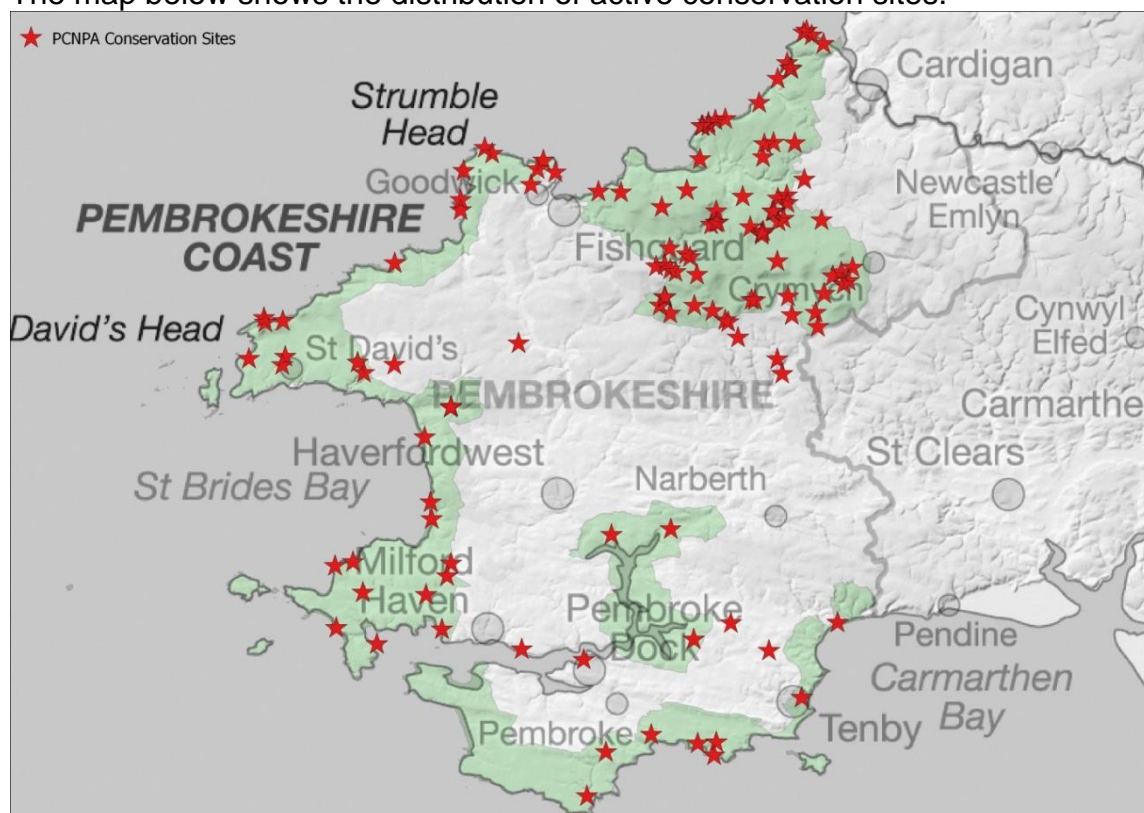
14. Improved guidance: Park Direction has prepared guidance to ensure consistency in the management of PROW by Delivery team. Guidance includes bridge maintenance, access furniture, PROW surface maintenance and dangerous trees.

Recommendation: Members are requested to RECEIVE and COMMENT on the Report.

(For further information contact Martina Dunne or Charles Mathieson on extensions 4820 or 4848 respectively)

Annex 1 – Conservation Monitoring Summary 2013/14

The map below shows the distribution of active conservation sites.



1.A The status of sites subject to conservation works is measured using a Red-Amber-Green (RAG) Scale:

Red

1.B A site is judged to be “Red” where agreed management is not in practice and where damaging activities have taken place, and where the habitats are unable to support the desired species. In this scenario the Authority will make a judgement on whether or not to continue involvement with the site following discussion with the land owner.

Amber

1.C A site can be judged to be amber where issues exist with the management of the site and/or where the ecology of the site has not yet improved to the desired level. A proportion of the sites that the authority is involved with are of amber status; this is usually because the site is still in the recovery stage, but heading towards green status.

1.D It is also important to point out that the results of management are influenced by environmental conditions, particularly climate. Whilst a site may not be achieving ideal results for particular species (e.g. because of an

unseasonably wet summer) it may still provide good quality functional ecosystems/habitats. These are then in ideal condition for when environmental conditions improve and the species in question can recover again.

Green

- 1.E A site is judged to be “Green” where management has been successfully implemented according to an agreement with the land owner and where a site is deemed to be in good ecological condition i.e. where ecosystems are functioning and supporting species expected on the site.

Results

- 1.F Conservation sites in the active work programme are subject to at least annual audit visits.
- 1.G For the monitoring period of 2013 to 2014 approximately 69% of the sites under active conservation management were judged to be of “Green” status (see above). The remaining 31% of the sites visited were judged to be of “Amber” status; as mentioned above this is because many sites are at the beginning of their management.
- 1.H None of the sites audited during the 2013/2014 monitoring period were given a red status.

Highlights of this Monitoring Period

- 1.I The ‘favourable’ or ‘favourable recovering’ condition of the habitats on our sites is reflected in the status of some notable species and suites of species. For example, the rare Greater Butterfly Orchid appeared for the first time at one of our management agreement sites near Rosebush last summer; the appearance of this species at a new site has not been recorded before.



Greater Butterfly Orchid

- 1.J Willow clearance work undertaken near Dinas has also seen the reappearance of the rare Royal Fern, with more notable species being anticipated this summer.

- 1.K Grazing at Trerhos Common nr Welsh Hook has led to the reappearance of two rare plant species previously thought to have been lost from this site (yellow centaury and pillwort).
- 1.L New agreements in the north sector have also turned up new sites for the rare marsh fritillary (Europe's fastest declining butterfly).



Marsh Fritillary

- 1.M NPA involvement at a farm near Cresselly has turned up a brand new population for the rare brown hairstreak butterfly; scrub cutting here using volunteers will no doubt increase its numbers over coming years.
- 1.N Meadow management continues to create spectacular floral displays, as shown in the photographs below; this in turn creates ideal feeding habitat for our declining pollinators.



Stackpole churchyard



Site at Manorbier

- 1.O A large new hay meadow was recently created near Manorbier and last year's monitoring revealed the seeding to have been very successful and already home to nesting skylarks.
- 1.P Dartford warblers continue to appear on some of our coastal sites, aided by milder winters and ideal nesting conditions created by our winter gorse burning programme.
- 1.Q Barn owls have been recorded in some of our nest boxes this year; all 50 boxes will be monitored by a contractor this June.

1.R The abundance of bracken appears to be declining on many of our sites subject to our bracken control programme; landowners happily comment that bracken height and density has reduced significantly.

Woodlands

1.S **Penlan** - Conservation work at Penlan to provide more habitat for the southern damselfly has provided ideal conditions for the scarce three lobed crowfoot (*Ranunculus tripartitus*). Grazing has proven to be a key tool in maintaining habitat and the results at Penlan speak for themselves. Areas at Penlan excluded from a grazing regime e.g. the trial site are now becoming scrub and woodland.

1.T **Tycanol** - Following a period of very little management the woodland pastures at Tycanol have significantly opened up over the last three years and into this monitoring period, and this is in no small part thanks to the efforts of the woodland wardens.

1.U **What could have gone better**

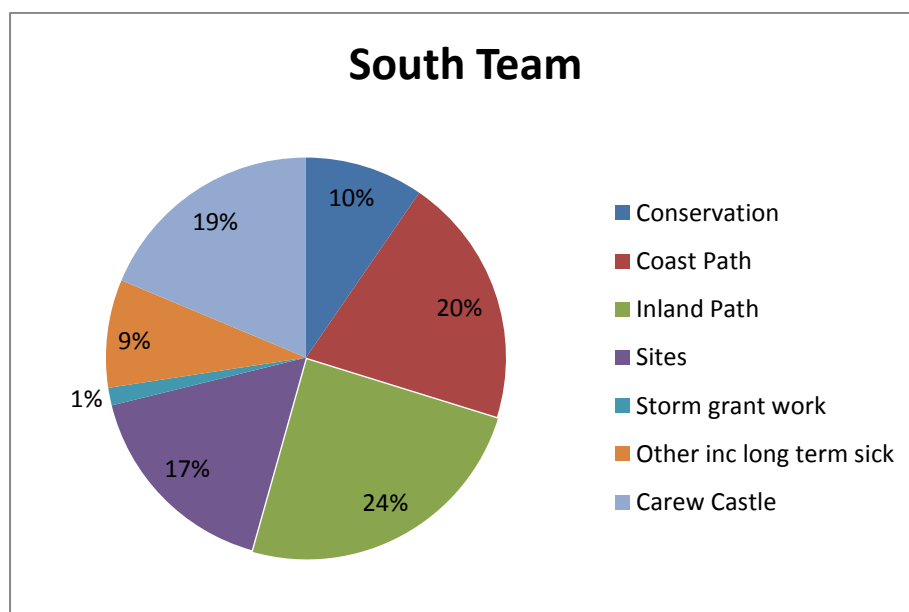
- Monitoring also revealed some less positive results.
- The long cold spring resulted in lower numbers of breeding skylarks this year (e.g. St David's Airfield), a reminder of the sensitivity of species' breeding success to external factors like the weather.
- The rare Newport centaury was monitored at one of our sites this year; very few plants were found, so management there will be reviewed this year in conjunction with the local botanical recorder.
- Chough – possible slight decline in numbers. Questions over inbreeding as a possible factor.

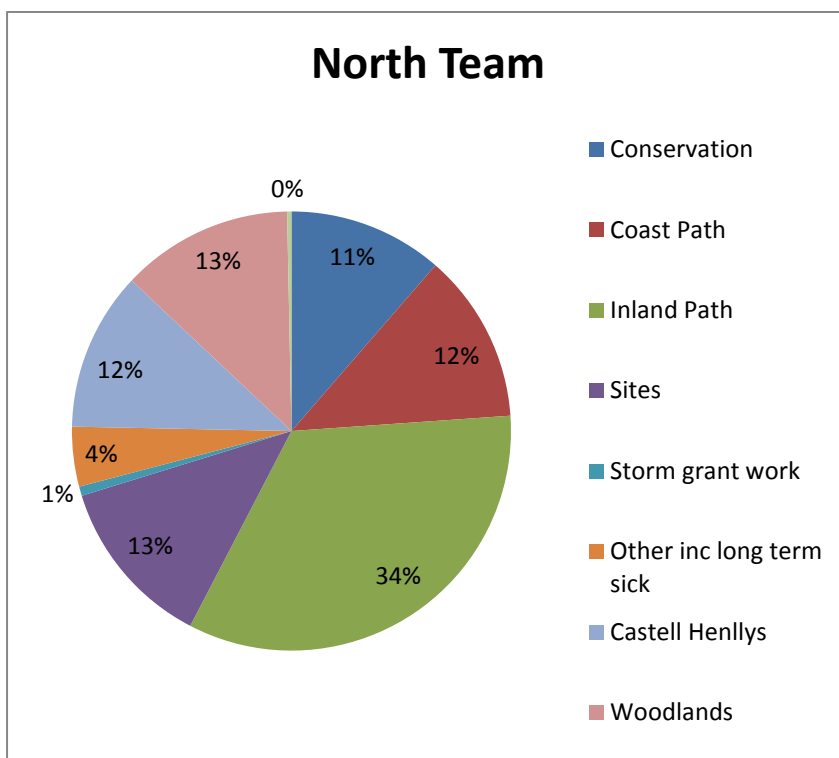
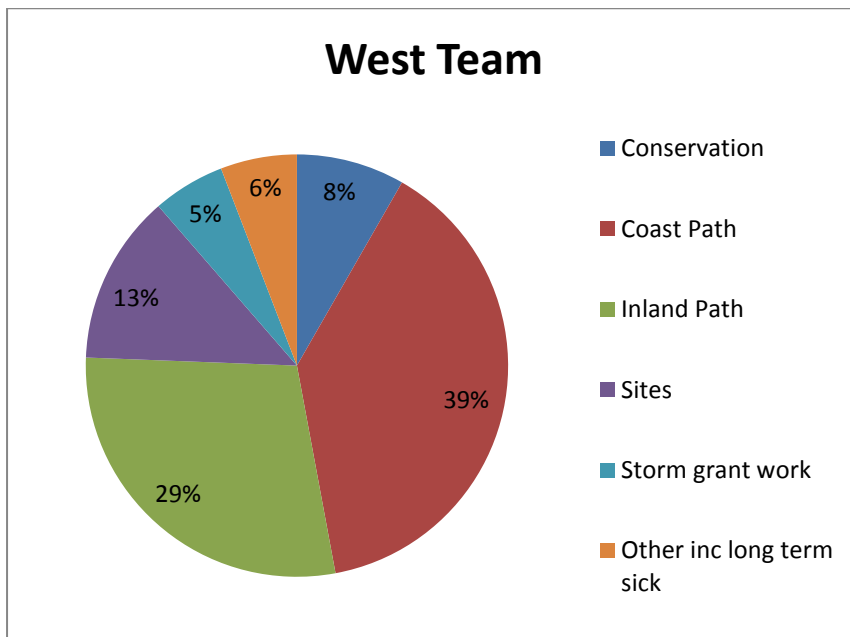
On the whole, the National Park's work continues to support traditional management practices which maintain habitats in optimal condition for wildlife. For more detailed site summaries and monitoring results see: <F:\Park Direction\Subjects\Land management\N-W-S>

Annex 2 - 2013-2014 Warden Time Commitments by Area Team

2.A The division of time between the different areas of work is shown in the charts below. Broadly the resources available to each area of work have been kept close to those which were available in the previous system. The integrated teams bring significant advantages in terms of flexibility to a site or an aspect of the work that previously had a single warden/ warden team. There are some jobs where a larger team can carry out the work more cost-effectively and where the work load is uneven through the year, gaps in work in one aspect can be filled by transferring staff to other roles. If there is sickness in one area then the role is more easily covered because the whole team have an understanding of the various roles. This has been especially important this year because we have experienced a high level of long term sickness. By having three area bases with warden teams, contact with local community and landowners is a priority and travel time is much reduced. This is to some extent offset by the need to share some specialist equipment and the risk of different standards across sites – where before a single team maintained all of them. However the increased involvement of the Direction Team in specifying maintenance plans for key sites has brought conservation advantages.

Proportions of time spent in each area on different aspects of Wardens' work





Differences between Areas

South

2.B The south has the most access and recreation sites and provides the maintenance service for Carew Castle. In addition to the coast path there are 192 km of public rights of way to maintain and the most heavily used paths but the lowest number of conservation sites. A new depot at Milton has greatly

improved the staff working situation but took a good deal of time at the start of the year to set up.

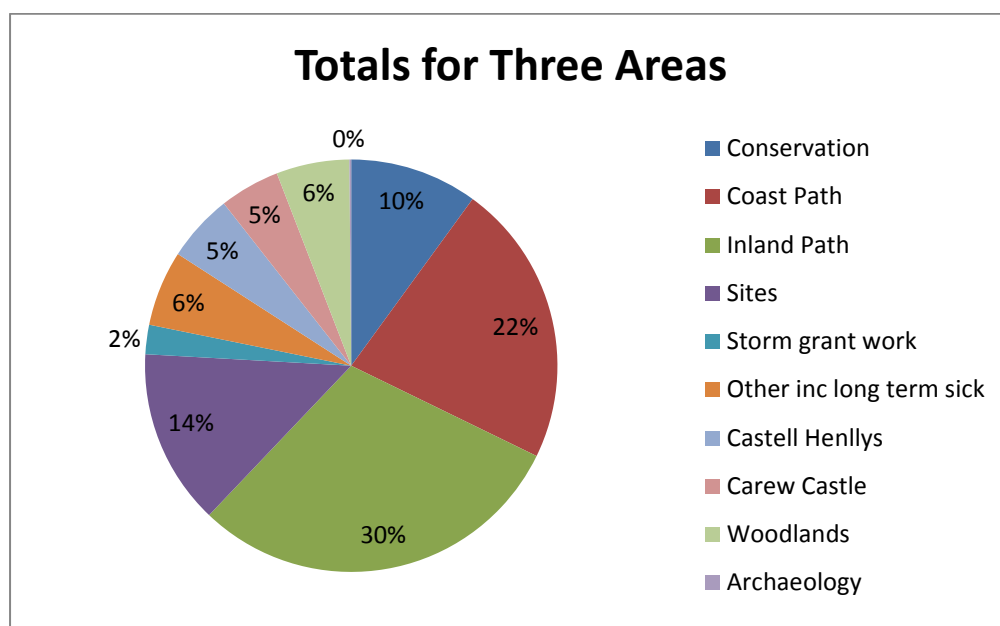
West

2.C The west has the longest stretch of coast with 90 miles of Coast Path and a significant number of access sites and 242 km of inland path open and available for use (but requiring maintenance).

North

2.D The area has the largest network of inland paths (301km) and there is a significant commitment at Castell Henllys. The stretch of Coast Path is shorter in the north than in west or South. The bulk of woodland work commissioned is in the north (though the west and south area teams manage other woods within the property portfolio), as are the majority of conservation sites (see map at Annex 1).

2.E Proportions of time spent in each area on different aspects of Wardens' work 2013- 4



2.F Looking ahead

Having each of the Warden roles in integrated teams makes it easier in principle to change the emphasis on different activities as corporate priorities change. There are, however various limitations on the amount of change which can be made because of the responsibilities associated with the different roles.

The greatest proportion (at least 30%) of warden time is spent on the management of the **inland rights of way network**. This is one of the best ways to provide enjoyment of the National Park and gives the authority an opportunity to work on the network across the whole of the park. Doing the work provides good contacts with

farmers and with community councils and increases the contribution of the National Park Authority both to the local economy and the health / fitness agenda. The work is done on behalf of the County Council who as Highways Agency have the ultimate responsibility. There is an unfunded delegation agreement from the County Council to the National Park Authority which is at present under review in terms of the numbers of paths included. A high level of investment into delegated paths is important to maintain the standard that visitors and local people expect and to ensure that paths are safe in use.

The second highest percentage of warden time (22%) is that spent on the **Coast Path**. Here high standards of safe and sensitive management are even more critical and the contribution to the economic and health benefits is arguably even higher. The path is managed to defined National Trail standards and an annual report on condition is produced for Natural Resources Wales who fund 75% of maintenance costs. In some years the NPA also obtains additional project funding from the Wales Coast Path. The arrangements for supervising the management of the Wales Coast Path as a whole are currently being discussed and the authority is looking to make an active contribution.

Site maintenance at 14% covers all of the authority property portfolio which is available for public use. Car parks, beach heads, viewpoints and some quite significant holdings such as Porthgain, Poppit Sands, St Bride's Haven, Llanion HQ and Freshwater East. The work includes a range of access and conservation / woodland tasks. In addition another 5% of time is provided to each of Carew Castle and Castell Henllys. For these sites the fact that they are owned by the Park Authority makes it particularly important that they are well presented and safe for use. We have in recent years implemented a reduced cutting regime to put greater emphasis on wild flower and invertebrate populations but most of these sites remain primarily important as entry points to the attractions of the National Park.

Commissioned **Conservation work** (10%) The Warden work programme is only one way that the authority achieves conservation objectives and many other benefits are derived from advice to landowners and from management agreements. However for some sites the owner may be unable or unwilling to carry out the necessary management work and here the warden teams perform a range of tasks from fencing and clearing scrub prior to grazing, to managing controlled burns, arranging treatment of bracken and helping graziers to move stock for conservation grazing. The work is commissioned by the Direction team for action by Park Delivery.

The Park Authority owns around 600 acres of **woodland** in the Gwaun Valley (6%). Much of this is SSSI and SAC oak woodland managed under the Better Woodlands for Wales grant system which is coming to an end. The intention is that the woods should be entered into the Glastir woodland management scheme in the autumn of this year and that management under the existing management plans should continue. In 2013-14 the amount of woodland management work in the north was reduced because staff were diverted to deal with storm response tasks. Clearly the resources allocated to different aspects of the authority's work can be changed as priorities develop, new opportunities arise and in response to budget limitations. It is important to recognise however that reducing maintenance funding without reducing the underlying responsibilities and liabilities may be a false

economy; – just to give two simple examples – on the Coast Path regular drainage clearance work seems a mundane and unimportant task until heavy storm rainfall causes gulying requiring major investment to rectify. Similarly, cutting paths at the right time with adequate resources means that the work can be completed relatively quickly. At times when we have delayed cutting, the time taken for a single cut increases significantly with greater wear and tear on staff and machinery, not to mention reduced enjoyment for the user. Sometimes savings may create additional un-foreseen costs.

Annex 3 - Bar Charts Showing Numbers of Tasks Commissioned / Completed

3.A The proportion of completed tasks in 2013-4 was around 84%. Non-completion was largely due to the weather (either too wet to carry out conservation burning or having to give significant time to storm repair priorities after the January/February storms) or because of staff sickness. This is roughly the same proportion of work completed in 2012-13 but the overall programme of work in that time was increased.

