



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Scrutiny Inquiry Panel - Natural Environment**

Committee Room 1 - Civic Centre, Swansea

Monday, 18 June 2018 at 9.30 am

Present: Councillor P K Jones (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)
E W Fitzgerald
Y V Jardine
S Pritchard

Councillor(s)
L S Gibbard
J W Jones
W G Thomas

Councillor(s)
P R Hood-Williams
I E Mann

Other Attendees

Officer(s)

Deb Hill
Bethan Hopkins
Paul Meller

Nature Conservation Team Leader
Scrutiny Officer
Strategic Planning and Natural Environment Manager

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): H M Morris

1 Apologies

2 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

None

3 Minutes

- Deferred to next meeting

4 Terms of Reference

5 Natural Environment - Roundtable Discussion

- Convener Peter Jones went through the terms of reference and the aims of the inquiry
- Two new pieces of legislation are driving the need for the inquiry
- Want to see biodiversity as integral in all Swansea Council decisions which are relevant

- The purpose of the session is to highlight problems and solutions
- **Colin Cheesman – Plantlife**
- Volunteers are very important to this area of work
- Swansea is extremely diverse and important for plant life
- By working in partnership we can achieve and overcome some of the barriers
- People need to understand biodiversity and how it matters to them
- Monitoring is very important so we can establish the situation and trends
- **Kerry Rogers – Natural Resources Wales (NRW)**
- NRW has a huge remit
- The cover all protected sites. There are 35 sites of Special Scientific Interest in Swansea, 6 Special areas of Conservation (SACs) 2 Special Protection Areas (SPAs), two Wetlands of international importance (Ramsars) and one candidate SAC.
- There is a loss of grazing in Fairwood and all the Swansea Commons
- Air quality is linked to transport networks
- Partnerships are very important (e.g. Fire Service, Water Agencies, third sector bodies etc)
- NRW interface with several departments in Swansea Council – would like to see that brought together much more
- There is a cost benefit to working together e.g. trapping sand dune project which meant highways didn't have to keep cleaning it up
- Managing the coast path encourages biodiversity and tourism
- Wildflowers are important (eg for pollinators and public engagement) but need to be carefully targeted
- Actions should consider impact on biodiversity
- Swansea is a very green city with lots of natural resource value
- **Adam Rowe - South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBReC) Limited**
- The role of SEWBREC is to observe and identify species and keep records
- They also arrange training events
- Much of the evidence is gathered by specially trained volunteers
- Because of the full coverage of important species in Swansea, you cannot undertake a project without impacting an important species
- Working in isolation is not an option
- The Aderyn site allows people to access this information
- Swansea Council didn't access SEWBREC information between 2004-2017
- SEWBREC can be used to create buffer zones around sites and do a full audit – by species too
- Information is sent via planning listings to officers which includes important species
- Having access will be essential and will cost £8,000 to £10,000 per year
- **Heather Galliford and Chris O'Brien - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)**
- The Dartford Warbler is so special
- The biological diversity is global and so important
- The Nature Recovery Plan (Policy Document) is echoed via organisations today
- It is important for Swansea Council to govern effectively

- RSPB would like to see Swansea take the lead on embedding this policy documents
- The Public Services Board Wellbeing Plan and the Local Wellbeing Statement are mismatched
- Section 6 of the Environment Act 2016 requires reporting on progress and actions by the end of 2019 – will Swansea Council be ready for this
- Estates, parks, planning and regeneration all need to be on the same page when it comes to biodiversity and nature conservation
- **Nigel Ajax-Lewis - Wildlife Trust for South & West Wales (WWT)**
- WWT manage land, inform people of their work and progress and raise awareness
- Some concerns over rivers in Swansea
- Some of the activities throughout the Council are mismatched and need to be a more joined up approach to the natural environment and biodiversity
- **Steve Bolchover – Swansea Biodiversity Partnership and Chair of Swansea Environment Centre**
- People care about the natural environment
- Places like the Loughor Estuary and Oxwich are just two examples of important sites
- A large part of Swansea falls under important sites for insects
- Swansea is not very good at maintaining biodiversity
- It is important to protect sites between each other to encourage connectivity
- The Council is using foreign seed mixes for wildflowers when they should use native ones the benefit of bees and insects
- Be mindful of using weed killers before planning new flowers
- There are some plants which are spreading wild and disrupting native flora and fauna – this needs to be managed
- Fly tipping and litter is causing issues through behaviour, practice and policies
- Wheelie bins may be a better solution as it reduces road side litter and plastic bag use
- People need to use appropriate materials to burn in domestic wood burners and avoid collecting dead wood for fuel as this is important habitat for bugs
- Need to be resilient in relation to climate change and warmer, wetter weather. Provisions need to be put in place for potential flooding issues
- **Chris Dow – Forest School Swansea Neath Port Talbot**
- Schools have no money to focus on environmental education and making young people environmental champions even though they may want to
- Many voluntary organisations are going under due to the loss of grant funding
- It is not easy for organisations to make money from this area of work
- It must be sustainable
- **Discussion**
- There are some unregulated activities on the coast such as bait and driftwood collection for commercial use
- There are many invasive marine species and litter which has a negative impact
- Difficult to change culture and behaviour of people
- There is a process which needs to be followed in relation to planning applications and ecology reports

- Other Councils such as Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil and Monmouth are all undertaking activities to improve their green infrastructure or prioritise/raise profile of the work of biodiversity and natural environment in line with legislative requirements
- Each council department should embed biodiversity and share the burden of the work
- The best examples of funding is when the budget comes from each council department which impacts or benefits from the natural environment and biodiversity
- Tourism has a significant benefit from the state of the natural environment and this is an obvious place to draw money from
- The cost effectiveness of training children about the importance and maintenance of the natural environment and biodiversity is priceless but difficult to measure
- Councils can frustrate by not having all departments work together at the same time
- For some people/departments biodiversity has a negative value as it can prohibit or slow down work
- Flood risk management can be done more effectively and cheaply using natural methods
- The mix of services feeding into this work will release more money ongoing and this in turn will feed into higher aspirations such as extra funding for educations and social services
- There is also a huge health benefit to having natural surroundings and the NHS are starting to use it as part of treatments
- Some species we have are important enough in their own right to warrant funding for maintenance and preservation
- **Suggestions for Swansea Council from organisations**
 1. Sign up to the Service Level Agreement with SEWBREC to access important mapping/species data for projects
 2. Stand by the policies it already has
 3. Work in partnership to achieve projects, this will reduce costs and bring in expertise
 4. Improve communication within departments and challenge those (including external organisations) who aren't doing what they should be
 5. Develop links with the right staff and consult at the right stage
 6. Don't ignore the Lower Lliw Valley. Biodiversity has to be maintained and improved for the future generations in line with the act
 7. Take responsibility for developing plans and get departments to work together not against each other
 8. Senior management need to be involved and this needs to be taken seriously at the highest level
 9. Value volunteers and volunteer co-ordinators – some money and effort has to be put into this

The meeting ended at 12.30 pm

Chair