



City and County of Swansea

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

Committee Room 6 - Guildhall, Swansea

Thursday, 26 July 2018 at 1.00 pm

Present: Councillor P K Jones (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)
E W Fitzgerald
I E Mann

Councillor(s)
P R Hood-Williams
S Pritchard

Councillor(s)
J W Jones

Co-opted Member(s)

Co-opted Member(s)

Co-opted Member(s)

Other Attendees

Mark Thomas

Cabinet Member - Environment & Infrastructure Management

Officer(s)

Bethan Hopkins
Paul Meller
Sue Reed

Scrutiny Officer
Strategic Planning and Natural Environment Manager
Community Buildings Development Officer

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): L S Gibbard and W G Thomas

Co-opted Member(s):

Other Attendees:

1 Apologies

2 Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

- None

3 Notes

- Approved

4 Friends of Swansea Council Groups - Discussion

- Although not listed as an agenda item, a member of the public wanted to ask a question

- The Convener accepted this and the question and member of the public's details have been forwarded on to the relevant department
- The 'Friends of' volunteers were thanked by the Convener for their hard work and dedication to their areas
- The reason for the inquiry was explained along with the aims and objectives
- There are currently 3 Council officers supporting 40 sites and 27 'Friends of' groups
- There are no more Parks Development Officers
- Each group was given the opportunity to speak about their area and make comments

1. Pamela Morgan – Swansea City Botanical Complex

- A wildflower garden has been developed in Singleton
- The youngest horticulturist is 55 years old so there will be no trained horticulturists within 5-10 years
- Groups rely on that specialist expertise to support their projects
- There should be two main points of contact for the groups
- 1. A horticulture specialist
- 2. An education officer linking schools to the spaces
- There also needs to be signage for areas such as Clyne so people know they are there
- There is an increase of biodiversity with plants, bees and birds as a result of the work being done by the group
- Some areas are being allowed to be truly wild – sometimes this can be confused with 'neglected' but this is not the case
- It allows for the natural flora to grow

2. Neil Jones – Swansea Vale Nature Reserve

- Mr. Jones is an experienced person in relation to nature and biodiversity
- He commented that many of the wildflowers which have been planted are garden flowers and not native plants which does not benefit properly to the biodiversity e.g. bees
- Mr. Jones believes there have been issues in the past around the allocation of SINC sites
- Records need to be accurate to ensure decisions made are based on correct information
- Neath Port Talbot Council have a scheme where road verges were designated as 'wild' and mown/maintained differently
- Some people will complain that they are neglected but there needs to be culture change

3. Rosemary Harvard-Jones – Rosehill Quarry

- The quarry is a 7 acre inner city park
- There are some regular volunteers at the moment but they receive lots of help from officers like Sean Hathaway
- Knotweed is big problem – you can't get funding for some projects if you have knotweed on the site
- Would like to list the flora and fauna in the park but can't because they do not have the expertise to do this

- Again would like to link in with horticulture specialists and education officers
- **4. Phil Stockton – Pentyla Playing Fields (Ganges)**
- Mr. Stockton became involved due to a history of planning applications for the site which he wanted to challenge
- Ecological reports which are submitted for planning applications should be accurate and impartial
- Voluntary groups should not have to provide environmental/ecological evidence of sites because this should be mapped already
- The Council departments seem to have differing priorities from each other – some financial some environmental
- The site needs to be recognised as a green space
- A range of plants have been added by the group
- Groups want the Council to recognise the importance of sites to people and to the environment

5. Marian Francis – Kilvey Hill

- Close ties with the Nature Conservation Team, Forestry Commission and Natural Resources Wales to manage Kilvey Hill
- Currently working on keeping new conifers down to encourage native species such as oak to grow though. Proving very successful
- The Woodland Trust donated some new trees so they have been planted
- There has been a noticeable increase in dragon flies and butterflies
- The group have been doing a lot of litter picks
- There have been community events with children to encourage them to look after the site and learn but they want to do more
- Having a link to liaise with schools is essential as it encourages learning and involvement in the area
- The NEET team (Not in Education, Employment or Training) are a group which volunteers are keen to link with
- They would like to have a roundhouse on Kilvey Hill
- It is an opportunity for all relevant departments and interested people to work together
- Public signs advertising the areas would be very beneficial so people know the sites are there for visiting
- Litter picks are undertaken but volunteers need better links for removal
- Potential for section 106 money for community and social infrastructure money from developers in the area

6. Steffan Phillips – Morryston Park

- Morryston Park is the oldest garden in Swansea and dates back to 1775
- There is 47 acres in total
- Its role is mixed, it is an urban park you can play in and it contains a range of biodiversity
- A welcome pack and plans for each park would be useful when volunteer groups take over management
- Native perennials and meadows are more important than wildflowers
- Groups are desperate for expertise and the planning and identification of existing biodiversity
- Initiatives don't come with maintenance plans or budgets to keep projects sustainable

- Working between departments can be difficult as they have differing agendas
- Council work e.g. path building is often substantially more expensive than private contractors, it should be easier to have this kind of work done
- Needs to be a central point of expertise for groups to contact
- Needs to be a varied approach to different parks and sites
- Urban parks can help with education and serve as educational hubs for the community
- Need improved links with schools and community projects

7. John Ashley – White Rock

- It is a 48 acre site
- White Rock was not maintained for 3 years
- It is a scheduled monument under Cadw and a Site of Specialist Scientific Interest (SSSI) under Natural Resources Wales (NRW)
- Unusual because it is a riverside park
- There have been issues with vandalism and safety including deliberate fires
- The volunteers are working closely with PCSO's who are a great source of help
- There is a substantial amount of 'vegetative overburden'
- The volunteers are currently working with the nature conservation team to manage the site

8. Christine Thomas – Pontarddulais – Coed Bach

- Everyone must try and look after the environment
- Groups are able to pull in funding if they apply properly and with support
- You can learn so much about people and the environment when you volunteer
- It is so beneficial socially to get involved
- There are no resources from Welsh Government only direction about needs to be done
- Interrupting photosynthesis of any plants will damage its ability to grow – including knotweed
- There needs to be more joined up thinking between everyone who is involved
- Inspired by other people and learned so much

9. Nature Conservation Team

- The team are involved with various groups
- Do lots of litter picking
- Also link in with the Rights of Way team and the Ramblers
- Swansea does have a high concentration of knotweed

Discussion

- The issue of knotweed came up and some discussion around treatment – it was agreed that this requires a separate and dedicated consideration
- Housing developments can be a risk to biodiversity
- Not everyone is aware of section 106 agreements
- Environmental budgets have been hit
- Grant forms from Welsh Government are incredibly long and complicated – people need support to complete them
- Sharing services is vital to protect areas and benefit from expertise
- In urban areas particularly it is vital to encourage young people to get involved, it may then encourage them to green spaces further afield

Minutes of the Scrutiny Inquiry Panel - Natural Environment (26.07.2018)
Cont'd

- Culture needs to change around the abuse of sites – maintain close working with the PCSOs
- Tree and bird surveys are very important to sites to establish what is there, how to care for it and will help with publicity
- Some sites need expertise around ponds and water courses too
- The volunteers were thanked for their time and efforts by each of the Panel members – this work could not happen without them

The meeting ended at 3.00 pm

Chair