



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Gower AONB Partnership Steering Group**

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Monday, 30 November 2020 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor P Lloyd (Chair) Presided

Councillors

M C Child

J P Curtice

P R Hood-Williams

L James

A H Stevens

Steering Group Members

R Button

J France

S Heard

S Hill

G Howe

P Jenkins

H Osborn

B Parry

P Thornton

Officer(s)

Paul Meller

Strategic Planning and Natural Environment Manager

Chris Lindley

Gower AONB Team Leader

Mike Scott

Gower AONB Officer

Jeremy Parkhouse

Democratic Services Officer

Apologies for Absence

Steering Group Members: J Chambers and D P Tucker

1 Election of the Vice-Chair for the 2020-2021 Municipal Year.

Resolved that Steve Heard be elected Vice-Chair of the Steering Group for the 2020-2021 Municipal Year.

2 Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea, no interests were declared.

3 Minutes.

Resolved that the Minutes of the Steering Group Meeting held on 21 September 2020 be approved as a correct record.

4 Clyne Valley Country Park Update.

Mike Scott, AONB Officer presented a Clyne Valley Country Park Update Report. It was outlined that following on from discussions at the previous meeting, issues

affecting the management of the Park, both in the current COVID-19 context and into the long term, there had been a number of initiatives and work within the area, including: -

- Construction of Shared Use Paths (SUP) using existing bridleways through the Country Park – funded by an Active Travel grant;
- Conservation works to the Ivy Tower – part of Clyne Arsenic Works Scheduled Monument;
- Work with Clyne Valley Community Project and Swansea Council's Countryside Access Team to progress wider access improvements, interpretation and other heritage conservation;
- An assessment of damage to the Clyne Valley Shaft Mounds Scheduled Monument from unauthorised construction and use of mountain bike tracks;
- Proposals from other parties for the development of an 'Urban Bike Park'.

The Steering Group were updated in respect of the ongoing projects listed above and discussions took place regarding the following: -

- Lack of communication and consultation regarding the Active Travel proposals;
- Lack of an overall plan / control in respect of the Country Park, lack of knowledge locally and work being done on an ad hoc basis;
- How the Covid 19 Pandemic had significantly increased the use of the Country Park, how more people were aware of the facilities available and the effect of increased usage upon the Country Park;
- Shared use of paths / bridle ways / cycle routes, introducing improved signage, using the correct surfaces, communicating any changes with the appropriate people / organisations and improving routes going forward to avoid conflict between users;
- Properly maintaining the Country Park in a structured and organised manner;
- How various Departments / Sections within Swansea Council had responsibilities within the Country Park / Clyne Valley and the need for more co-ordination;
- The areas of the Country Park that are within the AONB boundary;
- Co-ordination of a management plan going forward and disappointment that a plan had not been previously organised;
- Concern regarding the process of undertaking works without consultation and how the process worked in reality with money being made available by Welsh Government to fund Council Active Travel schemes;
- Concern regarding the manipulation of the system by the Council in order to achieve its aims without meaningful consultation which received an adverse reaction regarding the Active Travel proposals at Mayals Road and the implications of a similar approach towards projects on Gower.

Resolved that the contents of the report and discussions be noted.

5 Port Eynon Report.

Chris Lindley, Gower AONB Team Leader presented a Briefing Note which had been circulated to the relevant Community Councils, Councillor Richard Lewis and other community contacts on Friday 20 November. The briefing provided an update on the

project work at Port Eynon which included the background details, the considerations arising from the feasibility study and actions being undertaken.

This included the appointment of architects - 'Rural Office for Architecture Ltd' by Swansea Council to develop a Concept Design for a new beach / community centre building in Port Eynon. The commission was supported by a Sustainable Development Fund grant and the work started on 23 November 2020 and would include the undertaking of a preliminary survey, assessment work in and around the car park in Port Eynon and the information collected being used in the design development.

It was added that community engagement and consultation was key to a successful design outcome and the Council wanted to keep stakeholders / the community informed and interested in the proposals. Given the Covid-19 restrictions, some on-line consultation methods would be used. In addition, site visits or small group gatherings would be arranged to discuss the project and present proposals at key stages. These were planned to commence in early December.

The Steering Group discussed the following: -

- Communicating effectively with the wider community surrounding Port Eynon and Horton and the aims for wider consultation going forward;
- The feeling in the local community that the plans had already been agreed without their input and the project was commencing;
- How the Council had recently engaged with Port Eynon and Penrice Community Councils regarding progress, the need for a resource to be in place to be able to engage, the need to hire professional architects to progress to the development phase and the brief provided to the architect regarding the toilet block building;
- The fact that the community had been aware of the proposed project for quite a while and the positive feedback received in respect of the proposals;
- Financing the project through capital funding which required designs to be able to progress, hence the engagement with the architect;
- The issue of traffic management in Port Eynon due to the very narrow access road into the village and how the architect had been requested to bear access issues in mind when designing the community building;
- The fact that Port Eynon had been identified for appropriate small scale development including community facilities and this policy had been included in both the LDP and UDP for over 20 years which the Community Council should have been aware of and informed its residents, how Swansea Council had engaged extensively on both plans;
- Swansea Council had engaged architects to improve its own building / land in Port Eynon and required plans to enable it to engage with the community and allow local residents / businesses to have an input.

Resolved that the contents of the update report and discussions be noted.

6 Gower Society Issues.

Gordon Howe, Gower Society representative presented a report which firstly outlined the Case for an Article 4 Direction for The Vile, Rhossili and secondly, highlighted the need for the Protection of Trees within the Gower AONB.

- The Case for an Article 4 Direction for The Vile, Rhossili

The background surrounding the setting up of a temporary catering unit, without any planning application required in the centre of the historical area, known as The Vile, was explained, including the legal right under the *Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 - Part 4 - Temporary Buildings and Uses - Class B* to have such a unit for a total of 28 days in the calendar year.

The concerns of the Gower Society and Rhossili Community Council were outlined, particularly their concern that there would be complications and damage to the landscape. It was explained that the Vile Field System in Rhossili is a Registered Historical Landscape of Outstanding Importance in Wales. A photograph of the Vile was provided at Appendix A.

It was added that the Gower Society was actively investigating with others, the possibility of obtaining an Article 4 Direction to prevent such inappropriate future development and sought the views of the Steering Group.

There were no objections to the proposals.

Resolved that the contents of the report and discussions be noted.

- The Protection of Trees within the Gower AONB

Further to discussions that occurred at a previous Steering Group meeting, the Gower Society highlighted the apparent lack of protection given to trees within the compass of the AONB and its fringes. It was added that within SSSI's and National Nature Reserves protection was provided, although very few trees were actually given protection by specific Tree Preservation Orders.

The opinion of the Society was explained in relation to the current regulations administered by Swansea Council and NRW and examples of tree felling during the previous two years were provided. In the response of the Gower Society to the Trees, Hedgerows and Woodlands on Development Sites Consultation Draft in September 2020, the lack of protection given to the AONB was highlighted. In addition, it was explained that the loss of trees on Gower due to Ash Die Back and the impact of their removal on the landscape of Gower would soon be evident.

The Gower Society suggested that a complete survey of all trees should be made and suitable protection given wherever appropriate. It was added that more trees must also be planted in order to compensate for the losses of ash trees and help to address climate change issues.

The Steering Group discussed the details contained within the report.

Resolved that the Gower AONB Team Leader highlights the issue to the National Association of AONB's and reports back to the next scheduled meeting.

7 Cefn Bryn Update.

The Gower AONB Team Leader provided an update report regarding progress on Cefn Bryn.

It was explained that following the verbal update on the parking issues at Cefn Bryn at the previous meeting in September 2020, the Vice Chair (Steve Heard) and Gower AONB Team Leader (Chris Lindley) had an online meeting on 8 October 2020 with Alan Ferris (Swansea Council Highways) and Bob Griffiths (Cefn Bryn Commoners).

The outcome of that meeting was an agreed revised scheme that:

- extended the proposed highway bunding eastward from the parking area – from 50m to 200m;
- included a small and discrete repair to bunding on the south side of the highway, to deter vehicle access onto that part of the common.

It was added that grant funding for the proposals had been confirmed. Highways were working on the revised costs to the project and specifications. The works were expected to be programmed and implemented before the end of March 2021.

The Gower AONB Team had written to the landowner for their comment on the proposals. As Cefn Bryn was a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the Gower AONB Team would also approach Natural Resources Wales for a Notice of Assent under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

A further update would be provided at the next AONB Steering Group meeting.

Resolved that the content of the update be noted.

8 Update on Revised AONB Design Guide.

Paul Meller, Natural Environment Section Manager presented a report which provided supplementary planning guidance (SPG) in support of planning policies contained in the Swansea Local Development Plan (LDP). The purpose was to provide guidance as to how relevant policies of the LDP should be applied in order to assist in the determination of planning applications within the AONB.

It was added that the first Design Guide was adopted as SPG to the now superseded City and County of Swansea Unitary Development Plan (2008). The revised Guide takes account of the most recent changes to the legislative and strategic planning context that had arisen at both national and local level. This included the latest Gower Management Plan (2017) and amended versions of Planning Policy Wales and supporting Technical Advice Notes produced by the Welsh Government.

Public consultation was undertaken by Swansea Council through Sept-Oct 2020 which sought views on whether the document covered an appropriate range of planning issues and provided sufficient clarity for applicants and decision makers on the important principles governing development in Gower.

The majority of the comments received were positive, with only relatively minor changes suggested in order to improve clarity. In particular, the use of more appropriate photographs and imagery had been suggested and these were being sought for the final version of the document.

As no significant amendments had been identified from the comments received that necessitate redrafting and re-consultation, it was proposed to report a revised version of the document to Planning Committee early in the New Year for adoption.

The Steering Group commented upon the remarkable job by Council Officers in producing the documents in such a short period of time.

Resolved that the contents of the report be noted.

9 Cycle Access in Gower.

John France provided a report that outlined the scheme to create a cycle network across Gower, which particularly highlighted the proposals at Mayals Road and Clyne Woods.

Resolved that the report be noted due to the issues being discussed at Minute No.4.

10 Sustainable Development Fund.

The Gower AONB Officer presented the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) Panel Financial Summary report.

It was outlined that the Welsh Government had confirmed the SDF budget for 2020/21 as £100,000. There were currently 12 projects approved with SDF funding for 2020/21 and 3 further applications were anticipated shortly.

Further projects would be brought forward during 2020/21, to fully commit the funds. The Committed Funds figure included the CCS Management Fee of £10,000 (10%).

Total Funds available	£ 100,000
Committed Funds	£ 80,065
Uncommitted Funds	£ 19,935
Applications in progress	£ 11,000

The budget for 2021/22 had not been confirmed, but was anticipated to be £55,000. Four projects had been approved, with £25,650 committed and currently £29,350 remained uncommitted.

11 Future Meetings Format.

Steve Heard, Vice Chair highlighted that whilst meetings remained online during the Covid 19 Pandemic, he very much hoped that physical meetings would resume once the restrictions had been lifted.

There was a consensus that Steering Group meetings should return to physical meetings when possible.

The Chair sympathised with the issues raised and highlighted that the Council would follow legal and Welsh Government guidance.

The meeting ended at 3.00 pm

Chair