

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

MINUTES OF THE GOWER AONB PARTNERSHIP GROUP

HELD AT LLANRHIDIAN HOLIDAY PARK ON MONDAY, 8 DECEMBER
2014 AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor P Lloyd (Chair) presided

Councillor(s)	Councillor(s)	Councillor(s)
J P Curtice J E C Harris	R D Lewis	K E Marsh

Representing Organisations:

R Button	-	Tourism Swansea Bay
S Heard	-	Gower Riding Club/Port Eynon Community Council
Community Councillor P R Hood-Williams	-	Upper Killay Community Council
G Howe	-	Gower Society
B Parry	-	Gower Walking Festival
P Lanfear	-	Gower Commoners Association
Alan Woodman	-	Forestry and Farming
Community Councillor R Cooper	-	Llanrhidian Higher Community Council
J Davies	-	Bay Trans
R Wright	-	NRW

Officers:

K Flanders	-	Planning Policy and Environment Manager
M Scott	-	Gower AONB Officer
J Parkhouse	-	Democratic Services Officer

Also Present:

I Button	-	Rhossili Community Council
E Cowley	-	Dunraven Farm, Burry Green
M Cowley	-	Dunraven Farm, Burry Green
A Flanagan	-	Gower Power Co-operative
L Mabbett	-	Manselfold Farm, Llanrhidian

30 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M C Child, C Lindley and H Lloyd.

31 **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS.**

The Chair, who was attending his first Partnership Group Meeting, welcomed all present to Llanrhidian Holiday Park, Llanrhidian and commenced proceedings.

32 **DISCLOSURES OF PERSONAL AND PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS.**

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

33 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME. (10 MINUTES - QUESTIONS MUST BE RELATED TO AGENDA ITEMS)**

The public present indicated that they wished to ask questions in relation to items listed on the agenda.

RESOLVED that the questions be asked when each item is being discussed.

34 **MINUTES.**

AGREED that the Minutes of the Gower AONB Partnership Steering Group Meeting held on 22 September 2014 be accepted as a correct record subject to the following amendment:

Add the apologies of Community Councillor R Cooper - Llanrhidian Higher Community Council and R Wright - NRW.

35 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES.**

Broadband on Gower

R Button highlighted that very little progress had been made in relation to improving the Broadband service, particularly in Rhossili. He stated that some local businesses had to move back to Swansea due to the insufficient Broadband speed and other businesses were encountering significant problems as a result.

It was added that Edwina Hart AM had been contacted and had highlighted the issue with BT. It was hoped that the situation would be overcome very quickly.

36 **GOWER AONB - AFFORDABLE HOUSING.**

A Woodman presented a report on affordable housing in Gower. He made reference to Policy EV 26 of the Unitary Development Plan which states that "within the Gower AONB, the primary objective is the conservation and enhancement of the area's natural beauty". In addition it added that "Government guidance requires decisions affecting AONBs to favour conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape, whilst having regard to the social and economic wellbeing of the area".

He further outlined that if the Gower AONB is required to contribute to future housing needs, then that housing must facilitate the conservation and enhancement of the AONB by providing affordable housing for rural workers who contribute to these objectives. Executive housing for people who make lifestyle choices to live on Gower, whilst daily commuting off the AONB for work, education, etc., does not contribute or conserve the area and must be resisted. National planning policy recognises the detrimental impact that commuting has on the environment. Traditionally people employed in the rural economy are amongst the lowest wage earners. It is critical for the future protection, conservation and wellbeing of Gower AONB that sufficient affordable housing, suitably located, for rural workers is provided. For these reasons it is critical that sufficient affordable housing for local workers is a central objective of future planning policy.

It was further commented that the forthcoming Local Development Plan should resist residential development within the AONB except for affordable housing needed for those workers employed within the AONB rural sector. Furthermore, building affordable housing away from existing settlements should be considered favourably where such development would support an established existing rural business site.

It was commented that the current policy of the Council was in favour of tourism but not of local workers. Any policy going forward should consider local people and the Authority needed to adopt a clear policy regarding affordable housing.

Detailed discussions followed and centred around the following:

- The LDP was currently out for consultation and having allocations on Gower which targeted affordable and local needs was a priority of the Authority. The consultation process will end on 16 January 2015 and the Authority is trying to address the issue through the LDP in order to support the rural economy;
- There are a number of houses on Gower that still have agricultural conditions attached to the property and those owners who had attempted to get the condition removed. The condition puts a responsibility on the owners to place the properties for sale as agriculturally based dwellings. This situation should be addressed prior to agreeing any policies;
- Houses for rent, shared ownership and converting properties to holiday lets should all be considered;
- Local people must accept that if they have planning permission due to their agricultural based job they must accept the position and the costs and may have to sell the property for less money. New policies need careful consideration;
- The only way the Authority can manage the situation regarding social housing is having control over the issue and should look at the profitability of rural businesses. Businesses should also consider using the industrial estate at Crofty;
- It is important to tie in the comments of the Steering Group to the City and County of Swansea priorities.

It was outlined that the LDP Map with proposed candidate sites was available for inspection at the Civic Centre.

It was proposed that the Gower AONB Officer draft a letter on behalf of the Steering Group to submit to the Planning Policy Team.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) the contents of the report be noted;
- (2) the Gower AONB Officer circulates a draft letter regarding affordable housing on behalf of the Steering Group to the Planning Policy Team.

37 **RENEWABLE ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE.**

A Woodman presented a report on renewable energy and climate change. He outlined that the need to use renewable energy was a more recent pressure affecting many protected areas, from within and outside their boundaries. Government requirements to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and the need to secure alternative sources of energy would have an increasing impact upon development within Gower, its landscape and seascape.

Currently the Unitary Development Plan governing the Gower AONB gives no clear framework over policy for deciding applications for renewable energy installations within the AONB. However, the Gower AONB Design Guide does give some guidance. It was added that an increasing number of houses within the AONB have domestic scale solar panel installations either on the roof or within their gardens. Already a number of small commercial ground mounted solar arrays have received planning approval and an application for a large scale commercial array at Ilston was recently refused planning permission by the Authority, which may be subject to appeal.

It was added that wind turbines and tidal regeneration, both within and outside the AONB boundaries could impact significantly on the landscape.

He added that the Gower AONB Partnership Steering Group should have a strong, clear policy on renewables and advise or lobby the Council in its development of the new Local Development Plan.

Mr A Flannagan circulated a leaflet which outlined the following in relation to renewable energy in the AONB:

- (i) Variety of types and sizes.
- (ii) Variety of ownership structures (i.e. where do the profits go?).
- (iii) Is it okay to export problems out of an area because it is beautiful?

- (iv) Food and energy security.
- (v) Is climate change a reality?
- (vi) Existing planning regulations.

He added that the Welsh Assembly Government were very progressive regarding renewable energy but he recognised that it is hard to generate income from the landscape. He added that it was important to innovate regarding future use of the land sensitively, particularly in these austere times.

It was stated that the LDP will include a renewable energy policy and these will be out for consultation early in 2015.

Members commented upon whether Gower was the correct area for introducing a model mixed economy, the amount of money Gower brings in to the economy of Swansea, how the land and food production is used effectively, i.e. should land be used for food production or providing renewable energy.

It was proposed that a subgroup be formed in order investigate the issues raised further.

AGREED that:

- (1) the contents of the report be noted;
- (2) a renewable energy subgroup be formed in order to formulate the draft policy of the Steering Group on renewable energy;
- (3) the subgroup reports its findings to the Steering Group in due course;
- (4) the membership of the subgroup be as follows: G Howe (Chair),
A Woodman, P Lanfear and Councillor K E Marsh.

38 **WELSH GOVERNMENT DESIGNATED LANDSCAPES REVIEW.**

The Planning Policy and Environment Manager, on behalf of the Gower AONB Team Leader, presented an update report on the Welsh Government Designated Landscapes Review. It was outlined that the Steering Group response to stage 1 of the review as provided at Appendix 1. It was added that as part of issues and events around Wales, Welsh Government had arranged a workshop to discuss the review at Parkmill on 10 November 2014 and notes and conclusions from the meeting will be published on the Welsh Government website.

Furthermore, the Gower AONB Team Leader attended an evidence session along with the NAAONB Chief Executive (Howard Davies) and other Welsh AONBs on 21 November 2014 and draft notes from the session would be circulated shortly. The review panel were expecting to report back to the Minister for Natural Resources early in the New Year.

AGREED that the contents of the report be noted.

39 **GOWER AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN CONSULTATION.**

The Planning Policy and Environment Manager, on behalf of the Gower AONB Team Leader, presented a report on the Gower AONB Management Plan Consultation.

It was outlined that the public consultation on the Draft AONB Management Plan commenced on 10 October and closed on 19 December 2014. Invitations to comment had been sent to all email addresses on the AONB Partnership distribution list. There had also been a press release and a special edition of the AONB Newsletter had been distributed, focusing on the plan review which was available for comment on the Council's website.

It was added that a few responses had been received from organisations. Following the consultation, the intention is to review the plan in the light of the comments received and to formally adopt the plan during 2015.

AGREED that the contents of the report be noted.

40 **PLANNING MATTERS WITHIN THE GOWER AONB.**

G Howe (Vice-Chair) presented a report regarding planning matters within the Gower AONB. It was commented that the Group had been repeatedly told that it cannot discuss any matter that has in any way a planning aspect. In his opinion, that did not allow the Partnership to express any sort of collective view on many issues that affect the long term viability of the AONB. He added that the Group is chaired by the elected City and County of Swansea Councillor and has a total of six other elected Members. None of these Members are allowed to be seen to be "predetermining" any planning issues. As a consequence, in his opinion, some issues that affect to AONB are neither discussed nor commented upon by the Steering Group. On one occasion, the City and County of Swansea Members did leave the room and the remaining Members of the Steering Group were able to make an observation on a particular point. However, this procedure was not comfortable and it was procedurally difficult.

He added that another aspect of concern was the perceived lack of requested input from the AONB Officers into the weekly planning process. He commented that in his understanding, the Officers are rarely consulted upon what are often key planning issues that can affect the AONB. He noted that Mark Winder is recorded as very often having an input into planning applications (environmental, barn owl, bats, etc.) and the effect upon the AONB is minor in comparison with key planning issues. He questioned why the AONB Team are not consulted and had an input into planning issues that affect the AONB.

Members commented on the planning procedures and practices that they must follow, including those of predetermination. It was added that the Welsh Assembly Government were imposing changes upon Local Authorities in relation to planning matters, particularly management of planning committees. This could potentially reduce the number of planning committees within the City and County of Swansea to

one, therefore resulting in a number of elected Members not being part of the formal planning process. Further details will be available in the New Year.

It was added that matters applicable to the AONB were included in the AONB Design Guide guidance. In addition, any matters outside the Design Guide would result in Officers within the AONB Team being consulted.

AGREED that the contents of the report be noted.

41 **GOWER AONB RANGER REPORT - QUARTER 3 2014/2015.**

The Gower AONB Ranger Report for Quarter 3, 2014/2015 was provided for information. The Planning Policy and Environment Manager added that sadly, due to a reduction in funding, the contract of the Gower AONB Ranger would not be renewed at the end of March 2015. She added that this was in no way a reflection of the job undertaken by the Gower AONB Ranger but was as a result of the significant budget cuts being imposed upon the Council and NRW.

AGREED that the contents of the report be noted.

42 **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND PANEL UPDATE REPORT.**

The Gower AONB Officer provided a verbal update on the Sustainable Development Fund Panel. He outlined that for this Financial Year the panel had committed their £70,000 budget in full. The Welsh Government had verbally confirmed that the panel would have a budget of £60,000 for the next Financial Year and of that amount, only £6,000 remained uncommitted. He added that an Annual Sustainable Development Fund Panel Report will be provided at the Gower AONB Partnership Annual Forum in 2015.

AGREED that the contents of the report be noted.

43 **GOWER AONB PARTNERSHIP STEERING GROUP - MEMBER TRAINING.**

It was reported that the National Association for AONBs had arranged a bespoke training event for members of Welsh AONB Partnerships. The training will take place on 26 and 27 January 2015 at Snowdonia National Park Study Centre, Plas Tan y Bwlch, Maentwrog. Members who were interested were requested to contact the Gower AONB Team.

44 **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING - 7 P.M. ON MONDAY, 2 MARCH 2015.**

NOTED that the next meeting be scheduled for 7.00 p.m. on Monday 2 March 2015. The Democratic Services Officer will circulate details of the venue in due course.

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm

CHAIR