



Natural environment scrutiny inquiry panel

I am the Swansea Community Green Spaces Project Officer, an initiative that was funded by The Big Lottery up to December 2017, and has since been funded by Swansea Environmental Forum.

The Project's goal is to work with local communities to make better use of their public green spaces. About 20 local groups and projects have been supported during the project. This brings about a number of benefits including:

Community level

- Improved pride in the area;
- Maintenance or enhancement of the green open spaces;
- Enhanced outdoor facilities for the local community;
- Greater awareness of the existence of such green spaces;
- Improvements to the care for such sites by use of volunteers
- Reduction in anti-social behaviour;
- Closer community cohesion;
- Venue for outdoor community events, such as the Big Lunch, community picnics etc.

Individual level:

- Improved physical and mental wellbeing;
- Reduced isolation and loneliness;
- Local volunteering opportunities, that provide a meaningful activity and sense of worth;
- Greater confidence in visiting and enjoying the local outdoors.

Environmental level

- Encouraging the use of environmentally friendly practices;
- Provision of volunteers to maintain the site – e.g. knotweed control;
- Planting to increase local biodiversity, especially of native species;
- Reduction in litter, both through increasing vigilance by local residents and organised community litter picks;
- Observation of species – e.g. one group carrying out wildlife survey in conjunction with Nature Conservation Team

In all of the groups that I work with, I encourage them to place emphasis on maintaining and enhancing their spaces for the benefit of wildlife as a key priority.

In this capacity I have worked with Swansea Council's Nature Conservation Team (NCT), and other departments, to achieve the Project's goals.

Specific examples of activities that have been supported by the NCT include:

- Supply and planting of a bio-diverse range of native trees and shrubs at Pentyla Playing Fields (The Ganges) in Townhill. This involved a big community involvement, both in the





planting but also in the on-going care of the plants. This planting will extend westwards the Hillside Wildlife Corridor that has been a key 'green lung' for Swansea, and create a link with other green spaces in Cockett, Tycoch and further afield.

- Provision of fruit trees for the Seaview Community Green Spaces Project in Mount Pleasant. This very enthusiastic group has been very successful in creating community cohesion and improving individual wellbeing. It is a fine example of supporting people to get started in a project and then, as it grows in confidence, empowering them to self manage and set up as a constituted body. From a natural environmental point of view, organic growing practices are encouraged, thus preserving and enhancing the local flora and fauna. As well as the dietary benefits of growing food, getting regular exercise and working in a community plot builds relationships and confidence, all contributing to holistic wellbeing.

These are two examples of work done specifically with the Nature Conservation Team, but I have been supported by many other Departments, and Councillors, to increase access to and enjoyment of community green spaces.

Examples of this includes:

- Combined donations from Councillors in Uplands and Townhill Wards to provide 'anti-bike gates' at The Ganges – this improves wheelchair/buggy access to the site whilst restricting motorised bikes that have been an issue in the past. Making the site more accessible, whilst reducing anti-social issues, will help to get more people enjoying this community green space.
- Working with CCoS Housing, and supported by Cllr. Mary Sherwood, improvements have been made to pathway at Dyfatty Woods – a small pocket of woodland in an otherwise densely urbanised area. This improvement will encourage more footfall through the green space and also benefit Ysgol Crug Glas, a school for special needs students nearby. The school is keen to do more outdoor learning and the improvements to the pathway will facilitate this. Educating students about their natural environment will ensure future generations value and respect it.

Conclusion

With ever decreasing resources, projects such as this can fill the gap between what the Council is legally obliged to do and what it would have done previously. The Nature Conservation Team's approach is a very good example of harnessing the power of volunteer groups and what can be achieved with limited funding. They ensure health and safety, as well as environmental safeguards, are in place, whilst empowering individuals and groups to take ownership of roles traditionally undertaken in-house.

It is very reassuring to note that the Nature Conservation Team are about to appoint a volunteer co-ordinator funded by Natural Resources Wales to provide support to volunteers and groups to look after and improve their local environment and help to expand the volume of work that they undertake.





Expanding on this, other CCoS departments could embark on similar approaches, supporting and working with local communities and volunteer groups, to ensure that the natural environment is always preserved and enhanced for future generations and the wellbeing of all.

