



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
Sean Hathaway
Tim Orrell

Scrutiny Officer
Strategic Planning and Natural Environment Manager
Community Buildings Development Officer
Environment Officer
Country Connection Project 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

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- 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