

Swansea Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy Briefing Note

Key Principles

Green Infrastructure refers to all natural features which make life possible. It is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities. Green Infrastructure includes established green spaces and new sites and should thread through and surround the built environment and connect the urban area to its wider rural hinterland i.e. woodlands, wetlands, open and running water, river banks, parks and gardens, allotments, churchyards, recreational space, green roofs.

Why do we need to consider enhancing our Green Infrastructure?

- Our environment underpins our social and economic well-being. Our future survival and quality of life is dependent on a healthy resilient natural environment through the multiple benefits it provides to society.
- Swansea is one of the most ecologically rich and diverse counties in the UK. Its unique variety of habitats and species and wonderful range of parks, greenspaces, nature reserves, beaches and landscapes needs to be maintained, enhanced and sustainably managed for the benefit of everyone now and into the future.
- Our natural environment and biodiversity is under threat and in decline due to unsustainable human activities. Habitats and species are being lost at an alarming and unsustainable rate.
- We urgently need to tackle climate change by reducing our use of carbon and by maintaining and enhancing resilient ecosystems and a strong GI network to help us mitigate for and adapt to the pressures of climate change.
- Increasingly land use planning is using GI to identify networks of healthy ecosystems to resilient cost effective alternative to traditional grey infrastructure.
- GI stretches far beyond parks and gardens and provides multiple benefits to our environment, society and the local economy by:-
 - improving local air quality,
 - creating green corridors to support biodiversity,
 - build resilience to safeguard against extreme weather events like flooding and over-heating,
 - improving building performance and reduced carbon emissions,
 - providing aesthetic amenities and destinations,
 - increasing community cohesion,
 - reducing the effects of poverty and health inequality,
 - creating a sense of place which celebrates Swansea's unique selling point - its fantastic natural environment,
 - providing spaces to relax, socialise and enjoy nature.

Legislation

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 - Enhancing and improving the variety and quality of GI in Swansea contributes to the Council's duty to improve well-being as required by the Act. The benefits of GI contribute to all of the 7 well-being goals, and improving GI is one of the steps of the Council draft Resilience well-being objective, and the Public Service Board's 'Working with Nature' Well-being Objective.

Environment (Wales) Act 2016 - The Council has a legal duty under the Act to protect and enhance biodiversity and maintain resilient ecosystems, and to report our progress to Welsh Government. Enhancing and improving the variety and quality of GI in Swansea is a key component to meeting this duty.

Planning (Wales) Act 2015 – the Act links how land is managed in Wales with how natural resources are managed to ensure the right development occurs in the right places. Draft Planning Policy Wales Edition 10 states in para 5.68 that ‘*green infrastructure plays a fundamental role in shaping our places and our sense of wellbeing, and are intrinsic to the quality of the spaces we live, work and play in*’, and states that the ‘*planning system should protect and enhance green infrastructure assets and networks because of these multi-functional roles*’.

Swansea Council’s Corporate Plan – states that Swansea faces a number of challenges in the years ahead, one of which is climate change – risks from flooding, air and water quality dangers to ecosystem and biodiversity and energy security. Appropriate, good quality GI helps mitigate these challenges and reduce associated costs.

In addition to these key pieces of legislation improving the quality and variety of GI in the County will contribute to compliance with a raft of legislation around, air and water quality, climate change, surface water run-off, resilience planning, biodiversity, health and wellbeing – including mental and physical health, and helping alleviate social exclusion through improving access to good quality green space.

The Proposal

The Strategic Planning and Natural Environment Section is working in partnership with NRW to produce a suite of documents designed to enable the Council to take an informed and joined up approach to maximising the benefits GI can offer the County. This suite is made up of the following 3 documents:

1. City Centre GI Strategy - The Swansea Central Area Regeneration Framework (SCARF) states that Swansea Central is not meeting its potential. That the city centre is perceived as tired and outdated, with a lack of attractions to make it a destination all set in a poor quality environment. Incorporating innovative high quality new, and enhanced existing, GI will significantly improve environmental credentials of the city centre.

The overall regeneration programme is being delivered through a number of different phases and projects, and funded via different sources, to date GI has been addressed on a project by project basis. Having an evidenced and clear overall plan for public realm / green space zones, which function individually and collectively, physically and visually, enabling a joined up approach to GI would ensure we maximise the city centre’s potential and its environmental resilience. Because of the scale and advanced stage of the city centre development it has become clear that to realise this ‘once in a generation’ opportunity for the city centre to benefit from strategically planned GI enhancements, the development of a specific City Centre GI Strategy / Planning tool would be beneficial.

The Service is therefore investing £15,000 to be matched by NRW to employ a leading expert with a proven track record in the GI industry to develop this Strategy and Planning tool.

Timeline: Please note the project needs to be completed within this financial year.

September 2018	Draw up and agree a tender brief
October 2018	Advertise on Sell 2 Wales
November/December 2018	Appoint a consultant. Design and develop a strategy, to include internal stakeholder workshop, external stakeholder and community events.
December 2018/January 2019	Agree final draft and obtain sign off to consult
January / February 2019	6 week consultation

February / March 2019	Post consultation redraft.
April 2019	Strategy adoption and publication

2. Countywide GI Strategy – The Strategic Planning and Natural Environment Section is working in partnership with NRW to produce a County-wide GI Strategy. This Strategy will be used to inform all land use planning and developments in the future and is required to support emerging LDP Policy. This Strategy will be informed by, but be more generic than, the City Centre GI Strategy.

Timeline: Development of the County wide GI Strategy will start in early 2019. Stakeholder engagement will be significant and the aim is for adoption by Autumn 2019.

3. GI Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)- Swansea's (LDP contains a specific policy relating to Green infrastructure - *Policy ER 2 Strategic Green Infrastructure Network*. This Policy (as amended with matters arising changes following the LDP examination) seeks to protect and enhance the overall GI network and requires development to maintain and enhance the extent, quality and connectivity of the multi-functional GI network.

Development proposals are required to be designed to take into account the ecosystem services provided through GI and this aspect of the development proposal will form part of its assessment in the determination of planning applications. This approach to GI provision as part of new development is evident in the master plans for the LDP Strategic Development Areas, all of which are designed to include extensive GI provision.

The GI Strategy is required in order to assist in the GI assessment process and the planning related components of the Strategy will be adopted as SPG.

Timeline: the SPG will follow a similar timeline as development and adoption of the County-wide Strategy.

Regional and County-wide GI mapping project

The Nature Conservation Team have been collaborating with NRW, PHW and Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend Councils through a multi-PSB GI Working Group (linked to steps in Swansea's Local Well-being Plan Working with Nature objective) to procure a map of multiple benefits / opportunities for GI across the three Counties. This project, funded by the Welsh Government's GI Capital Grant, NRW and PHW, has three phases. The first phase (now complete) resulted in the creation of regional and County-wide GI maps which show where there is demand for a service i.e. flooding or air quality, the existing GI / greenspace stock and the opportunity to enhance provision and reduce risk. Phases 2 and 3 (currently ongoing) seek to use the evidence gathered to deliver GI improvements to a pilot area(s). The improvements will be designed with input from local and corporate stakeholders and partners and will be developed alongside existing activities over the Autumn of 2018. Swansea's pilot area is Castle ward (excluding the city centre). The aim is to deliver some targeted improvements which will improve health and well-being across the ward. The project needs to be completed by Feb 2019.

The evidence gathered from this regional project, will benefit the development of the suite of GI documents maximising the opportunities for using GI to build local environmental reliance.