



City and County of Swansea

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

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Monday, 5 July 2021 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor P Lloyd (Chair) Presided

Councillors

M C Child

P R Hood-Williams

L James

M Thomas

Steering Group Members

S Heard

G Howe

B Parry

P Thornton

Officer(s)

Paul Meller

Natural Environment Section Manager

Chris Lindley

Gower AONB Team Leader

Mike Scott

Gower AONB Officer

Jeremy Parkhouse

Democratic Services Officer

Apologies for Absence

Councillors: A H Stevens

Steering Group Members: R Button, J Chambers, J France and D P Tucker

1 Election of Vice-Chair for the 2021-2022 Municipal Year.

Resolved that Councillor L James be elected Vice-Chair for the 2021-2022 Municipal year.

2 Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea, the following interests were declared: -

Councillors P R Hood-Williams, P Lloyd and M Thomas declared personal interests in Minute No.8 - Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places - Award of Grant and Identified Projects.

3 Minutes.

Resolved that the Minutes of the Steering Group Meeting held on 15 March 2021 be approved as a correct record.

4 Sustainable Development Fund - Financial Summary. (Mike Scott)

Mike Scott, Gower AONB Officer presented the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) Panel Financial Summary report 'for information'.

It was highlighted that Welsh Government had confirmed the SDF budget for 2021/22 at £100,000. 14 projects had been approved so far, with £88,000 committed, and one further application currently under consideration for £12,000.

The Committed Funds figure included the CCS Management Fee of £7,500.55.

Total Funds available	£100,000
Committed Funds	£88,000
Uncommitted Funds	£12,000
Applications in progress	£12,000

It was added that an application was approved at the Grants Panel meeting on 28 June 2021, which fully committed the SDF grant scheme budget for 2021/22.

5 Sustainable Development Fund - Proposed Amendments to Terms of Reference. (Mike Scott)

The Gower AONB Officer presented a report which outlined that following discussions with Welsh Government, the Authority was considering some changes to the Terms Of Reference governing the SDF Grants Panel.

These changes were aimed at ensuring that the membership of the panel was diverse and well placed to implement the Sustainable Grant Scheme locally.

The Welsh Government - Key Recommendations for SDF Panels were provided as follows: -

- 1) The SDF Panel should consist of a diverse demographic of members, with representation from the AONB's Partnership where required.
- 2) Any pre-existing membership arrangements; where for example an SDF panel member is also required to sit on an AONB Partnership panel, should not be dissolved. *This requirement can over-rule point 3 covering maximum term if necessary.*
- 3) Panel members should serve for a minimum of 2 years and for no longer than 3 years, with any new panel members shadowing the exiting member for 1 year.
- 4) Panel appointment should be through a rolling programme carried out by the AONB staff with no more than one third of the panel being replaced in any one year.
- 5) Panel members are required to undertake basic training to keep themselves abreast of the aims and purposes of the SDF and the AONB.

It was added that the Gower AONB Steering Group would remain central to the governance of the AONB Partnership, which appointed to the SDF Grants and the SDF Appeals Panels.

The proposed amendments to the Terms of Reference would be reported to the next scheduled Steering Group meeting, prior to be presented for approval to the Constitution Working Group and Council.

Resolved that the contents of the report be noted.

6 Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places - Award of Grant and Identified Projects. (Chris Lindley)

Chris Lindley, Gower AONB Team Leader presented a report which advised that further to discussions at the Steering Group meeting in March 2021, the Gower AONB Team had developed project proposals with partners for consideration / approval of Welsh Government and the National Designated Landscapes Partnership (NDLP).

Appendix 1 provided the report to Swansea Council Cabinet on 17 June 2021 which outlined further details on the grant and the proposed projects.

The Steering Group highlighted the following: -

- Proposals outlined for Fairwood Common, particularly future management, the development of scrub as a result of under grazing, encouraging those with grazing rights to use it and put stock onto the Common;
- Working in partnership with Gower Commoners to improve the situation;
- The potential introduction of fenceless systems / livestock collars to control movement;
- Improvement of public access onto Fairwood Common;
- The development of a secure area on Swansea Council owned land just off Fairwood Common to prepare livestock prior to them being released onto the Common;
- Concern as to whether the funding for Pennard Castle would be used to improve the access to the beach.

Resolved that: -

- 1) The contents of the report be noted;
- 2) The Gower AONB Team Leader discusses the access to the beach at Pennard Castle with Pennard Golf Club.

7 Gower Society - Woodland Project Proposal. (Gordon Howe)

Gordon Howe, Gower Society presented a report which sought the views of the Steering Group on a woodland project proposal.

It was outlined that the Gower Society would be celebrating the 75th Year since its first, and formation meeting, in 2023. The Founder Meeting was held in the Royal Institution in January 1948.

The Society were minded to consider a project in partnership with others that would produce a lasting and indelible positive impact upon the AONB. One project for

consideration included the planting of a significant area of mixed woodland either on land that is designated or purchased specifically for the purpose. A scheme, such as a new woodland, would encourage wildlife, replace trees lost through disease in the AONB, link up with other woodlands, reserves as well as being educational and accessible for all by cycle and public transport.

The Society would like to attract, with others, considerable sums of money from Government and private sources that would make this a truly worthwhile and a National Welsh project.

The Steering Group were very supportive of the proposal and the Gower AONB Team Leader referred to the Welsh Government initiative to introduce a National Forest for Wales which would not be specific to one area of land.

The Gower AONB Officer added that Swansea Council Nature Conservation Team would be happy to assist with the proposal. Paul Thornton, Wildlife Trust added that his organisation were also supported the proposal.

Resolved that: -

- 1) The Steering Group supports the proposal for a woodland project;
- 2) The Gower AONB Team Leader facilitates further discussions and obtains further information regarding the National Forest for Wales initiative.

8 Roadside Verge Management. (Chris Lindley / Highways)

The Gower AONB Team Leader presented a report regarding Roadside Verge Management.

It was highlighted that Steering Group members had previously raised the matter of highway verge management within the AONB and had asked for this to be discussed at a Steering Group meeting.

Appendix 1 provided a paper considered by the Swansea Council Economy, Environment and Infrastructure Policy Development Committee on 22 April 2021 considering these matters.

He also made reference to a report provided by Philip Sterling, Dorset County Council regarding the positive impact of changing cutting regimes.

The Steering Group discussed the following: -

- The positive impact of more plants and flowers while not affecting access / safety issues on the highway;
- Introducing any change in a measured way including cutting less and removing the arising's to reduce the fertility of the soil and reduce future growth;
- Communicating effectively with the public when introducing change, clearly explaining why change was being introduced and addressing changes community by community;
- How some verges must be cut due to road safety;

- The progress made by the Authority, including grant funding obtained for the purchase of equipment;
- How dealing with the issues community by community was have a positive impact, for example, not cutting the hedges / verges west of Old Walls, which had increased the diversity and had seen the re-emergence of British flowers / plants;
- The overall reduction in wildflower planting by the Authority, recognising their positive impact upon communities and the long term need to introduce alternative methods;
- The complaints received from the public regarding how uncut hedgerows / verges were pushing traffic into the centre of roads / affecting traffic flow;
- How natural solutions can provide psychological traffic calming;
- Recognizing that one size does not fit all and providing a balance.

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

9 Informal Camping / Overnight Parking. (Mike Scott)

The Gower AONB Officer provided a report which highlighted the issues caused by informal camping and overnight parking.

It was outlined that like many parts of the UK, Gower had seen continuing growth in visitor numbers over the past few years which had been increased by the effects of COVID 19 restrictions on overseas travel during 2020 and 2021. Many places on Gower had issues with two particular types – camping and overnight parking by motorhomes or campervans.

It was added that in most cases, it was not so much the presence of those involved, it was usually the associated anti-social behaviour (noise, environmental damage, litter, etc.). Sometimes it occurred because visitors could not find official camping sites, however, more often it was a deliberate choice.

It was further commented that the legal situation was complex, differing between location and type. Frequently used terminology included: -

- Wild Camping – traditionally lightweight, was done in small numbers and only for two or three nights in any one place, usually as part of a walking or cycling trip. Technically, a civil offence rather than a legal one, it had sometimes been tolerated by landowners, usually being discrete and leaving no trace.
- Informal or Freedom Camping – was a widely adopted term for overnight parking or camping on the roadside, either in vehicles or tents. It is legal on the highway but may be a civil offence on private land.
- Dirty Camping - where people committed other offences such as littering, causing environmental damage (e.g. driving on sensitive vegetation or cutting trees for fires) or cause disturbance or nuisance to others. This may be a civil offence, but was more likely to be a criminal one.

The main issue of concerns was how these different situations were dealt with because in respect of civil offences, the responsibility rests with the landowner. The addition of anti-social behaviour would attract the possible involvement of the Police,

but it was often a low priority and frequently took a good deal of time to resolve, usually occurring at weekends or in the evenings.

Previously the AONB Ranger and local Police mounted regular joint patrols to “hot spots”. However, neither organisation had the resources to undertake the work at present. The AONB Team, working with partners, recently dealt with informal camping on Cefn Bryn by limiting vehicle access and the same approach may have to be taken elsewhere. The measures taken to address the issues were rarely simple, quick or cheap and often move the problem to another site, impacting upon other users.

The cumulative effect of informal camping, particularly dirty camping, could be huge on local communities, often experiencing repeated anti-social behaviour and damage / littering. It was often beyond individual landowners capacity to address the issues and was best tackled on a partnership approach.

The Steering Group discussed the following: -

- Social media highlighting sites for camper vans;
- The difficulties in dealing with the issues for landowners and lack of Police involvement unless landowners are threatened;
- The huge demand for these activities and the type of person they attracted, who wanted to avoid paying for overnight accommodation;
- Similar issues encountered, but on a much larger scale, in the Scottish Highlands;
- The issues encountered at Southgate such as litter and human waste due to no toilet facilities being available;
- The lack of respect shown to the countryside by those undertaking such activities / attending mini raves and the lack of Police numbers for enforcement;
- Proposed legislative changes which could potentially criminalize such actions.

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

The meeting ended at 2.52 pm

Chair