



City and County of Swansea

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

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Monday, 4 October 2021 at 2.00 pm

**Present:** Councillor P Lloyd (Chair) Presided

### **Councillors**

P R Hood-Williams                      L James

### **Steering Group Members**

J France                                      G Howe                                      P Jenkins  
H Osborn                                      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  
Sean Hathaway                              Environment Officer, Nature Conservation Team  
Ursula Jones                                 Communities and Nature Project Officer

### **Apologies for Absence**

Councillors: M C Child, A H Stevens and M Thomas  
Steering Group Members: R Button and D P Tucker

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## **10 Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.**

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

## **11 Minutes.**

**Resolved** that the Minutes of the Steering Group Meeting held on 5 July 2021 be approved as a correct record.

## **12 Financial Summary. (For Information) (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. It was added that 15 projects had been approved, with £100,000 committed, fully committing the funds for 2020/21 as outlined below.

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

Total Funds available	£100,000
Committed Funds	£100,000
Uncommitted Funds	£0
Applications in progress	£0

**13 Draft Amendments to Process of Appointing to the Sustainable Development Fund Grant Panel. (Mike Scott)**

The Gower AONB Officer updated the Steering Group regarding draft amendments to the process of appointing to the Sustainable Development Fund Grant Panel.

It was outlined that the Welsh Government had requested changes to the way the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) grants panels was appointed, and was aimed at ensuring that the panels consist of a diverse demographic of members, with representation from the AONB Partnership. The proposed Terms of Reference Procedural / Guidance Notes were provided at Appendix A.

It was proposed that the current process be amended to appoint members of the SDF Grant Panel and the SDF Appeals Panel. Currently, members of the Steering Group nominated 4 members of each panel every two years, for a term of two years. To meet the Welsh Governments guidance, it was proposed that the steering group appointed two members of each panel each year, for a term of two years.

The procedure amendment would enable a rolling appointment process, keeping the skills built up by the panel membership, while also introducing new members of the panel. Annual introductions to the work of the SDF grants panel would be provided, as part of the established programme of meetings.

The Chair commented that the amendment was a sensible proposal.

**Resolved** that the procedure amendment be approved and be forwarded for formal approval by the Council.

**14 Landscape & Biodiversity Grant Scheme. (Verbal) (Mike Scott)**

The Gower AONB Officer provided a verbal report on the Landscape & Biodiversity Grant Scheme.

He added that it would be part of the Sustainable Development Fund and would be aimed at community groups for schemes such as dry stone walling, hedging, copping, fencing, orchard creation, natural flood management and wildflower meadow creation. Schemes would be limited to 50% funding up to £3,000. Notes and the proposed application form would be circulated prior to the next meeting.

The Steering Group discussed including small architectural features / small buildings in the Scheme and ring-fencing the Scheme budget.

**Resolved** that the Scheme be approved and Officers proceed with its administration.

**15 Presentation - Gower AONB Communities and Nature Project Officer. (Ursula Jones)**

Ursula Jones, Communities and Nature Project Officer provided the Steering Group with a short presentation on her current role within the Gower AONB Team.

She provided details of the projects she had worked on since commencing the role in July 2021, including the Japanese Knotweed continuation programme in Parkmill / Ilston, footpath improvement works, grazing on Fairwood Common and the development of a management plan for Clyne Valley.

The Chair thanked her for her presentation and wished her well in her role.

**16 Gower AONB Tourism Pressures 2021. (Gordon Howe, Gower Society)**

Gordon Howe, Gower Society presented a report on Gower AONB Tourism pressures in 2021 which highlighted two distinct but closely interrelated issues: tourist capacity and visitor management.

The report made reference to the pressure being exerted upon Swansea Council and the Senedd to relax the current rules and regulations relating to camping i.e. tents, yurts and glamping on Gower. This was covered locally by the Local Development Plan (LDP) and it was defined in Sections TR6-TR9.

It was explained that permitted development rights were extended from 28 days to 56 days by the Government because of the Covid 19 Pandemic, to allow more tourism within the UK. While camping on Gower was exempt from this due to the changes brought about by the Article 4 during the 1970's, it had not stopped pop up mobile cafes and additional car parking. The lack of policing / official checking of wild camping / camper vans was outlined, along with the use of social media to highlight areas that were not checked or pop up attractions.

The increased pressure upon the AONB during 2020-2021 was emphasised, with most existing camping sites being full to capacity and unlawful activities being reported but not acted upon. Smaller official sites had also been inundated with requests and there was evidence that larger sites had soaked up much of the demand at the expense of the pleasure of normal customers and residents of Gower.

Reference was made to ongoing discussions within the Council, acceptance that some well concealed locations may be suitable for small additional sites, not permitting inappropriate and visually damaging locations, firmly policing licensed sites, the lack of a formal caravan survey by the Council since 2009 and the lack of a traffic survey on Gower to determine increased tourism numbers.

The report also highlighted increased tourism and the money being made out of the Gower brand, the lack of investment into protecting the AONB, Gower rapidly losing its character and was in danger of becoming a glorified theme park.

It further highlighted the demographic change of visitors to Gower, the increase in rough camping, the lack of resources to combat it, the lack of public disposal points for camper vans, the need for front line staff in Gower, organisations re-investing their income back into the AONB and using social media to educate and inform visitors to Gower.

The Steering Group discussed the following: -

- Similar issues affecting other areas in Wales / UK;
- The messages from Government / Welsh Government was for the public to stay local and enjoy the local environment / facilities and it was important to understand the impact of activities upon areas;
- The positive messages that can be sent via social media;
- The importance of positive engagement with the public;
- More finances being provided to National Parks to assist them in managing the issues highlighted;
- The profit made by individuals / companies in Gower / from the Gower brand;
- The need for an annual caravan survey on Gower;
- The need for a traffic survey on Gower, particularly in areas such as Rhossili where 1,000 cars per hour were visiting the village;
- Setting up a working group to discuss the issue going forward.

**Resolved** that: -

- 1) The contents of the report be noted;
- 2) A working group be formed and facilitated by the Gower AONB Team Leader;
- 3) Councillor L James, Gordon Howe, Barbara Parry and Hamish Osborn be added to the membership of the working group;
- 4) Representatives from Tourism and Highways be requested to attend the working group.

## **17 National Designated Landscapes Partnership - Autumn Seminar. (Chris Lindley)**

Chris Lindley, Gower AONB Team Leader presented a report which informed the Steering Group on the National Designated Landscapes Partnership Autumn Seminar.

The report provided the background to Tirweddau Cymru - Landscapes Wales and it was outlined that Designated landscapes had a critical role in taking action on climate and nature emergencies. It was added that following the Senedd declaring a nature emergency, designated landscapes were committed to playing their part on delivering on this declaration.

It was highlighted that Gower AONB Partnership members were invited to join Tirweddau Cymru - Landscapes Wales online on 19 October 2021 to hear about work going on across designated landscapes in Wales on the themes of:

- Climate change and decarbonisation;
- Nature based solutions and nature recovery;
- Sustainable Tourism; and
- Supporting communities to respond to COVID and promote a green recovery.

**Resolved** that the contents of the report be noted.

**18 UK Government Consultation on Strengthening Enforcement of the Dangerous Use of Recreational and Personal Watercraft. (Chris Lindley)**

Chris Lindley, Gower AONB Team Leader presented a report which detailed the UK Government Consultation on Strengthening Enforcement of the Dangerous Use of Recreational and Personal Watercraft.

It was outlined that the UK Government was consulting on proposed changes to legislation that would bring recreational and personal watercraft within scope of the provisions of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995.

By this change:

- personal watercraft and other recreational watercraft users will be subject to the same safety obligations, where appropriate, that exist for the operators of ships
- enforcement authorities will have an additional power of prosecution to be used in cases of deliberate or negligent misuse

It was added that Maritime safety was the responsibility of the UK Government; if the proposed changes were enacted, they would apply to Wales as a constituent part of the UK.

The Steering Group discussed the following: -

- the hugely disruptive nature / noise of jet skis and how they significantly affect a large number of people / wildlife;
- The need for individuals using watercraft to be respectful of other people / wildlife;
- Approaching manufacturers to make certain watercraft less noisy.

The Chair encouraged all present to comment upon the consultation.

**Resolved** that the contents of the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 2.53 pm

**Chair**