



## **Report of the Head of Planning and Regeneration**

**Gower AONB Partnership Steering Group – 6 December 2021**

# **Report on the Review of the Gower Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study for Caravan and Camping Sites 2014**

## **For Information**

### **Introduction**

The Gower Landscape Character Assessment, 2013, identified caravan and campsites as being a significant threat to the landscape quality of the AONB due to their detrimental visual impact. As a result, in 2014 the Council commissioned John Campion Associates to undertake the more detailed Gower Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study (hereafter referred to as 'the Study'), to identify areas at landscape capacity, in terms of caravan and camping sites, and areas which might have potential for expansion of facilities, whilst taking account of the capacity and suitability of the area to accommodate such expansion.

### **The Use of the Study in Development Management**

The Study provides an important factual evidence document that informed the drafting of planning policies for the Swansea Local Development Plan (LDP) in relation to tourism accommodation on, and in close vicinity to, the Gower AONB.

The following LDP policies cite the Study and state that applicants must demonstrate the proposed development site is within an area of landscape capacity, as evidenced in the Study:

- TR5: Holiday Accommodation
- TR6: New Static Caravan, Touring Caravan and/or Camping Sites within the AONB
- TR9: Extensions To, and Overflow Areas of, Touring Caravan and/or Camping Sites
- TR10: Short-Term 'Festival' Camping Events

The Study has proved a useful tool in guiding new tourism development to less conspicuous locations where the detrimental impact on the designated landscape and seascape is minimised.

### **Review and Update of the Study**

It is necessary to undertake an update of this work to accurately reflect the landscape impacts of caravan and campsites, document any material landscape changes and monitor any impacts of development since 2014, in order to provide an up-date evidence document to support the LDP.

An important consideration has been the introduction and popularity of alternative forms of accommodation since the 2014 Study. For example Pods, Lodges, shipping containers and other forms of non-operational development are becoming much more popular as forms of holiday accommodation. They are all forms of non-operational development and may have less landscape impact than traditional static caravans, even though they remain on site all year.

John Champion Associates have been commissioned by Swansea Council to undertake the review. The review has been part funded by AONB Grant monies from NRW.

The Review has been delayed to the Covid-19 pandemic as a decision was taken not to conduct the survey in 2020 as it may have provided a false picture of the quantum of caravan and camping within Gower, as many campsites only opened for vehicles that had self-contained toilet/ washing facilities, whilst some did not open.

The Review is building on the existing Study and will involve the following key stages:

**Stage 1:** A broad assessment of each Landscape Character Area identified in the Study to ascertain whether the identified landscape capacity remains valid. This includes consideration of 'newer' types of accommodation that are likely to remain on site all year around, but may have less landscape impact than other types of non-operational development such as a static caravan, cabin or lodge. The review follows the 2014 assessment and takes into consideration the scope for mitigation measures in relation to each LCA as a whole. Fixed point monitoring locations identified within the Study have been revisited in order to show any changes in the landscape.

**Stage 2:** Building on Stage 1 by providing more detailed evaluation for LCAs identified as having capacity for additional caravan and campsite provision without general detriment to their landscape character. Consideration of different design and landscape mitigation solutions in LCAs with different landscape /seascape character.

### **Progress so Far**

Field visits were undertaken in March and August 2021. A preliminary Stage 1 report has been submitted to the Council for review and the consultants are in the early stages of progressing Stage 2.

### **Next Steps and Way Forward**

The preliminary Stage 2 report is due early 2022.

It is anticipated that the Study will be used as an evidence base document in order to inform the LDP.

Elements of the Study may be taken forward as part of the Placemaking Guidance for Caravan and Campsites which is due to be prepared alongside the Study review. The Guidance would cover the whole County, not just the AONB. Following appropriate public consultation, it is anticipated that the Placemaking Guidance will be adopted as SPG to the LDP.

Points to remember:

- The Study is the starting point when considering the landscape impact of new tourism accommodation within the AONB. Issues such as highway infrastructure, residential amenity, drainage, lighting etc all have to be taken into account too.
- Little planning controls exist over existing sites, particularly in terms of design and layouts, particularly those that gained planning consent via the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act, 1960.