



Report of the Natural Environment Manager

Gower AONB Advisory Group – 25 September 2023

Gower AONB Team Report

AONB team members will provide verbal updates on the following:

Gower Show – the Gower show was cancelled on the afternoon before the show, due to high winds. Following the show, the AONB Team will review the display and interpretative/promotional material used by the team. This will be carried out over the winter, with the intention of having materials ready for the spring.

Gower Dark Sky Community Application – a draft application for “Dark Sky Community” status was submitted in January, and a response from newly appointed project officer has been received, with comments on the draft application. An amended application is to be submitted.

Gower Dark Sky – Retro Fit Projects – The Wales-wide collaborative project is underway with lighting consultants Ridge having surveyed Gower AONB and a report with recommendations for lighting improvements and estimated costings has been provided. Ridge identified 25 sites with potential for lighting retrofitting. Up to seven of these will have a detailed lighting survey undertaken in the coming months with a view to retrofit them. Three of these sites are having a before and after snapshot of bat activity to see if the lighting improvements have had an impact.

Port Eynon Bay Dunes – work is being planned for September. No comments have been received from the Community Councils.

Built Heritage – small projects to stabilise historical structures are planned or underway at St Marys Church, Knelston, Backingstone Chapel and Llanmadoc Pig Sty.

Fairwood Common – A meeting was held with NRW to discuss future working. The Commoners are to meet at the end of September to discuss how best to coordinate future working. Dormouse surveys are being undertaken to ascertain their presence in suitable habitat on the Common.

Pennard Castle – Interpretation panels were installed in 2022 & 2023. Stage 1 of the ivy removal works is complete – rare plant seed has been collected and grown on at Celtic Wildflower Nurseries, a Scheduled Monument Consent has been granted and the investigative work has been undertaken. Using the results from the investigative work, a tender document for Stage 2 of the works (ivy removal & some restoration work) will be drawn up for bidding contractors. It is anticipated Stage 2 will commence early 2024.

Gower Places of Worship – Initial surveys of twelve churches completed in 2022. Implementation of some recommendations is underway – new tower doors at Oxwich and Llanrhidian to allow continued access by roosting bats. Specialist surveys for bats and swift boxes are complete for several churches. Bespoke swift boxes have been made for two churches to allow them to be fitted without the need to screw into the fabric of the churches. Replacement ladders and loft hatches will be fitted at a few churches to allow safe and easy access for building and wildlife surveys and monitoring. Engagement with two churches on altering the mowing regime of the grounds to improve floristic diversity is underway.

Clyne Valley Country Park – Following a site visit with Corporate Building Services, stabilisation work will start this autumn on the Ivy Tower. Work is also being planned on the main buildings of the Clyne Woods Arsenic Works, following an environmental survey. Replacement signage at Blackpill is planned for October. Work to make the buildings at New Mill Farm safe is underway. Following vandalism, 6 picnic benches have been recovered from the fishing pond.

Biodiversity interpretation and a nature trail installed 2022. A second round of Japanese knotweed treatment scheduled for autumn 2023.

Parkmill Japanese Knotweed – A third year of treatment is partially complete for autumn 2023. A survey in spring 2024 will determine the need for any further treatment.

SDF Panel – dates of the grant panel have been confirmed for 2023/24 (22nd September, 8th December, 15th March 2024). A financial summary is provided separately.

AONB Advisory Group – dates for the Advisory Group have been confirmed for 2023/24 (25th September, 26th February 2024).

NAAONB Rebrand – the National Association of AONBs is discussing a significant rebrand to address some of the issues raised in the Glover Review – mainly around inclusion and working with under-represented communities, better communications, providing a more unified image, seeking to achieve a higher profile, and greater recognition of their contribution to nature recovery and climate change agendas.

AONB Team Staffing – an “AONB Nature And Communities Officer” will be starting in October, as a third member of staff within the AONB team, enabling more project work to be carried out. Work on restructuring the Natural Environment Section is continuing.