



To:
Cllr Andrea Lewis,
Cabinet Member - Climate Change
& Service Transformation

BY EMAIL

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Overview & Scrutiny

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28 March 2022

Summary: This is a letter from the Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member - Climate Change & Service Transformation. The letter concerns the meeting held on 15th March 2022 and the updates received regarding Nature Conservation Project Updates.

Dear Councillor Lewis

The Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel met on March 15th to discuss the Nature Conservation Team Project Updates. We were grateful to the officers for attending to aid discussions and answer questions.

The Panel received an update on the main project work currently identified as actions for delivery by the Council's Nature Conservation Team under the Corporate Plan Natural Resources and Biodiversity Objective and also arising out of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Inquiry Recommendations. An Action Log was supplied that highlighted the relevant progress made since the last report to the Panel in March 2021.

We raised and discussed the following issues in relation to individual actions within the log provided:

Action 2 - Prepare Corporate Section 6 Biodiversity Duty Action Plan

We recognised that this is a major piece of work and were pleased to hear the action plan taking us to 2023 is now in development. We asked about Councillor involvement in the development of this plan and we were informed that this would be most welcome and will follow after Councillor training in the new municipal year.

Action 3 - Preparation of Swansea Local Nature Recovery Action Plan

We heard that this action has been delayed due to the Council not having a full-time Biodiversity Officer in post, now this person is in situ things are progressing and an action plan will be developed by the end of the year.

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Action 5 - Prepare a County wide GI Strategy

We were told that this strategy has been on hold due to the ability to consult with the public being critical to development of this plan. Work has begun again and public engagement should start in the summer.

Under this item we raised a concern about monitoring of compliance and the enforcement of green infrastructure aspects of planning applications. We felt that this is currently insufficient and we believe improvement is needed. We heard that ideally legislation would be changed that would then enable the Council to be informed when infrastructure projects start, rather than finding out after projects have commenced. We do recognise that monitoring of compliance and enforcement is a resource intensive activity. We would like Cabinet to consider how this can be solved, one suggestion included requiring a green infrastructure sign off at the end of a project to ensure developers have satisfied the requirements. We have asked that this be scheduled for further discussion at one of our meetings early in the new municipal year.

Action 6 and 7 - Develop and adopt a Council tree policy, and prepare and adopt Trees and Development Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)

We were pleased to hear about this policy but highlighted the importance of being mindful of where trees are planted. We heard about one of the pieces of work being completed 'the right trees planted in the right place for the right reason' recognising there are many things to consider when tree planting, so an assessment is done to decide what type of tree is most suited to a particular spot.

Action 10 - Develop and deliver biodiversity training for Council staff, elected Members and PSB Members

We welcomed the programme of ongoing training and emphasised the importance of Councillor training at the beginning of the new Council Term. We heard that the Welsh Government are also developing Wales wide training for elected Members, so this will form part of our programme moving forward.

We did agree that the basics of biodiversity and climate change should also form part of the new Councillor Induction Training.

Action 12 and 13 – Recruit new Planning Ecologist and Section 6 Duty Biodiversity Officer

We were pleased to meet the new Planning Ecologist and Section 6 Duty Biodiversity Officer and look forward to hearing more about their progress in due course.

Action 15 - Co-ordinate and deliver the Local Places for Nature Grant programme

We heard that grants over and above those mentioned in the report have been and will be received. In total over half a million pounds of grant monies have been received including from Welsh Government and National Resources Wales in 2021/2022. There has been over one million pounds of grant money approved for the coming year, we did hear from officers that this is fantastic would add to the already considerable workload. We recognise that it does take a large amount of

time and resources to spend and deliver on these grants but welcome this as a good problem.

Action 18 - Plan, support and deliver new tree / woodland/hedgerow/orchard planting initiatives

We recognise that this is becoming more important as we move forward and that assessment of the number of trees planted was necessary but we also emphasised the importance of monitoring the number of tree being removed, so we can understand our overall tree stock and therefore make a carbon assessment regularly.

Action 23 - Deliver and provide support for school biodiversity awareness activities and practical initiatives and opportunities for school children to access and learn about their natural environment

We heard that the mixture of staff capacity and the pandemic has stopped this from proceeding but now we have the new posts in place, progress will be made on this action over the coming year.

We are interested in any thoughts you may have on the contents of this letter and would ask that you consider the following recommendation and provide us with a response by 18 April 2022.

1. We recommend that the basics of biodiversity and climate change form part of the new Councillor Induction Training.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Peter Jones

Convener, Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel

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