



To:

Councillor Robert Francis-Davies, Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration, Events and Tourism

Councillor Andrew Stevens, Cabinet Member for Environment and Infrastructure

Councillor David Hopkins, Cabinet Member for Corporate Service and Performance

*Please ask for:
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14 December 2023

BY EMAIL

cc Cabinet Members

Summary: This is a letter from the Climate Change and Nature Scrutiny Performance Panel to the relevant Cabinet Members following the meeting of the Panel on 28 November 2023. It covers Environmental Tourism. A formal written response is required.

Dear Cllr Francis-Davies, Cllr Stevens and Cllr Hopkins

The Panel met on 28 November 2023 and received an update on Environmental Tourism.

We would like to thank Cllr Robert Francis-Davies, Mark Wade, Steve Hopkins and Michelle Grove for attending to present the item and answer the Panel's questions which were relevant to that portfolio. We appreciate your engagement and input. As the Panel's questions included other portfolios, we have addressed this letter to Cllr Stevens and Cllr Hopkins also.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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We are writing to you to reflect on what we learned from the discussion, share the views of the Panel, and, where necessary, raise any issues or recommendations for your consideration and response.

Environmental Tourism

We feel there are not enough public facilities available, for example, toilets, drinking water taps, cycle racks etc along the more tourist areas of Swansea and the Gower, including the sea front, and queried if there are plans to increase these types of facilities. Cllr Francis-Davies stated this does not come under his portfolio but agreed there is a need for better toilet facilities, and stated the Council is doing the best it can with limited budget. This question was provided before the meeting and a response from the relevant departments shared at the meeting. We were informed there are public toilets close to all major beaches between Mumbles and Rhossili and that over the past 3 years, significant investment has been made in physical refurbishments and improvements to the cleaning regimes. We heard there has been no funding available to provide new public toilets but were pleased to hear that grant funding from the WG has been secured to install two new Changing Places specialist toilets facilities, in Knab Rock and Rhossili. We also heard the Council is investigating options for increasing cycle parking facilities at strategic locations across the active travel network, funded by Welsh Government's Active Travel Fund. We noted that although not primarily targeted at tourist areas, the placement of these facilities may capture visitors who engage in recreational cycling.

We feel Welsh Government Active Travel schemes are based more around commuters rather than going to leisure points and discussed how some of these commuter destinations are very close to tourist destinations. We queried if there is any potential for adding short links from the active travel routes to the tourist destination, as we believe many people would then use these routes. We heard the infrastructure in Swansea benefits tourists as much as residents, for example, the cycle routes into Mumbles and the Marina. We agreed a full response be provided by the appropriate Cabinet Member following the meeting.

We asked about the Wales Coastal Path and queried if any feedback the Council gets on any sections of the Path is communicated to Countryside Access for Wales, for example, a stretch of the Path that people would like to use more and that could be upgraded, and how money for this is drawn down. We heard from officers present that Rights of Way is an asset but maintaining it is a challenge, that there has been lots of investment at key parts of the path, and that the Tourism and Marketing Team have been able to promote this in some of its videos. Regarding ongoing investment, we heard the AONB Team look to the Tourism Department to provide research to back up any funding applications to Welsh Government. We agreed a full response be provided by the appropriate Cabinet Member following the meeting.

We discussed the cycle map of the area, and how previously in Scrutiny, members talked about a 'ski-style' map with red, blue, black and green lines showing the difficulty. We queried if this has been implemented in the map and how this is going to link up with rural Gower. Cllr Francis-Davies and officers present stated they are not aware of anything like this but perhaps the Council could talk to Sustrans to check if

they have any experience of it. We agreed a full response be provided by the appropriate Cabinet Member following the meeting.

We stated that Swansea is not registered on the Dark Skies website and heard the Council does not have Dark Skies status yet but is working towards it and by improving the offer, supporting businesses and promoting it, the Council is showing its commitment to trying to achieve it.

We discussed how people come to beaches in Swansea to experience 'dipping' in the sea at all times of the year but especially in Winter, and queried if this is worth looking into as a campaign for the Winter as it is extremely popular. We heard this has been discussed with the Beaches Management Group from a safety point of view, as it often takes place at times when the Council is not lifeguarding the beaches. We were informed the Council has had influence in reducing the number of jet skis coming in too close to shore which has improved safety for swimmers. Also heard mobile saunas have been introduced at Oxwich and near Caswell which is improving the offer.

We noted from the report, there are areas cycle paths cannot go through due to legal issues as there is opposition from certain groups. We queried if there are rights of way going through these areas for people to walk etc, and if so, can these rights of way be promoted more to encourage more walkers/cyclists to use them. We also asked if cycle racks can be located in these places. This question was provided before the meeting and a response from the relevant departments shared at the meeting. We were informed there are public rights of way recorded across the whole of the county and these are promoted by means of the website: www.visitswanseabay – all the promoted walks in the county are advertised on there, and the majority are also available as downloadable PDF's. Also, at the entrance to the Civic Centre there is a display of walking leaflets produced by the Countryside Access team and partners. We heard the definitive map is on Swansea council's website and this has all the legally recorded public rights of way within the county available for people to utilise. We noted that legally, cyclists do not have the right to use public footpaths, whereas they are entitled to use public bridleways. However, when considering surfacing for public bridleways, the type of surface suitable for equestrians, is not always compatible for cyclists undergoing active travel journeys.

We asked if the Council anticipates recent changes to bus services will have a big effect on green tourism, and if there are any plans to try and overcome this. Cllr Francis-Davies stated the area does not have a good public transport system and this affects places such as Gower and Lliw Valley. He added that the Council needs to keep putting pressure on Welsh Government to go back to regulated bus services that are not-for-profit. We heard bus services on Gower are covered by Adventure Travel (not First Cymru) so are not affected by these changes. Most tourist routes in Swansea are still operating Monday to Sunday but the frequency of service has reduced, which is a challenge. We noted that one of the issues with bus services is Swansea has two providers – Adventure Travel and First Cymru and they do not operate a through ticket system. We were informed that research in 2022 showed the majority of people are still arriving by car. The Council is trying to encourage people to use public transport and rail is an option into the destination, but the ongoing rail dispute is discouraging people using this option and is more likely to have had an impact on visitors. On a

positive note, we heard people are wanting to walk and cycle when they get here, and businesses are looking to invest in facilities which will hopefully attract more visitors in a more sustainable way.

Your Response

We hope that you find the contents of this letter helpful and would welcome comments on any of the issues raised within. Specifically, we would appreciate information, as described in the letter, about:

- Potential for adding short links between active travel routes and leisure destinations.
- Communication with Countryside Access for Wales regarding feedback in relation to Wales Coastal Path, upgrading and funding.
- Implementation of a 'ski-style' cycle map.

Please provide your response to these, and any other comments about our letter by 11 January 2024. We will then publish both letters in the agenda of the next available Panel meeting.

Yours sincerely

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