

Councillor Peter Jones
Convener, Natural Environment Scrutiny
Performance Panel

Please ask for: Councillor David Hopkins
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Our Ref: DH/JW
Your Ref:
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BY EMAIL

Dear Councillor Jones

I was pleased to be invited to the Natural Environment Performance Panel meeting on 25th September 2019. I support the comments raised by the Panel as set out in your letter of 4th October 2019 and confirm that I would be available for future discussions on the issue of Section 106 agreements and their use to enhance biodiversity.

I note that since the Panel meeting you have written to Ms Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs setting out the Panel's concerns in about a lack of funding for work relating to the natural environment and a lack of deterrent for biodiversity damage in legislation.

Following on from discussions at the Panel meeting you have subsequently asked me: *'Could there be a regional approach to biodiversity? There are many areas of Council work which are scrutinised, advised on or developed at a regional level such as education, regeneration and even transport. It would seem that a regional panel/body looking at collaborative ways to improve biodiversity across South West Wales could share skills, knowledge and resources.'*

I would advise that as part of the drive for greater regional collaboration across the Swansea Bay City Region new governance arrangements being proposed include a joint committee to oversee the coherent management and delivery of strategic land use plans. Land use planning covers both the built and natural environment in order to deliver sustainable places and development as well as strategically managing spatial growth. This means that biodiversity will be an integral component in future decision making at the regional level.

In addition the emerging National Development Framework (NDF) for Wales, which is currently subject of national consultation <https://gov.wales/draft-national-development-framework> recognises the role that natural resources, biodiversity and resilient ecosystems play in placemaking and supporting our well-being and prosperity. It includes a specific policy to this effect which requires local authorities, working with Natural Resources Wales (NRW), to take action at a regional level to secure biodiversity enhancements, safeguard ecological networks, and to maximise the use of green infrastructure and nature based solutions. This complements the emerging NRW Area Statements which will be the subject of monitoring mechanisms.

Specific biodiversity actions will be set out in a Strategic Development Plan (SDP) for the region which will encompass Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Carmarthenshire Councils. The SDP will cover all regional planning issues and governance arrangements will be put in place to oversee preparation, implementation and monitoring of the plan across all these issues.

Furthermore, regional and national collaboration on biodiversity matters is already well-established amongst practitioners for both the terrestrial and marine environments through, for example, the Wales Biodiversity Partnership, Local Nature Partnerships, All-Wales Association of Local Government Ecologists, CIEEM, CBEEMS, GI Working Groups, etc, which enables shared skills, knowledge and good practice. I would also highlight the fact that natural environment posts are already subject of job-sharing between Councils and this practice will continue as regional collaboration on biodiversity matters will form the basis of future funding bids.

I am satisfied that these proposed and existing arrangements adequately address the Panel's concerns and I do not therefore consider it necessary for a separate regional body to be established to specifically consider biodiversity which would potentially only add a further reporting burden and duplicate workload for already thinly stretched resources.

Yours sincerely



COUNCILLOR DAVID HOPKINS
CABINET MEMBER FOR DELIVERY & PERFORMANCE