



## City and County of Swansea

### Notice of Meeting

You are invited to attend a Meeting of the

## Economy, Environment & Infrastructure Policy Development Committee

**At:** Remotely via Microsoft Teams

**On:** Thursday, 22 April 2021

**Time:** 2.00 pm

**Chair:** Councillor Cyril Anderson

**Membership:**

Councillors: J E Burtonshaw, P Downing, P R Hood-Williams, P K Jones, M A Langstone, W G Lewis, P Lloyd, P M Matthews and T M White

**Watch Online:** [//bit.ly/3sQrPgg](https://bit.ly/3sQrPgg)

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### Agenda

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1 Apologies for Absence.	
2 To receive Disclosures of Personal & Prejudicial Interests from Members. <a href="http://www.swansea.gov.uk/disclosuresofinterests">www.swansea.gov.uk/disclosuresofinterests</a>	
3 <b>Minutes:</b> To approve & sign the Minutes of the previous meeting(s) as a correct record.	1 - 5
4 <b>Management &amp; Maintenance of Open Spaces (Biodiversity).</b>	6 - 11
5 <b>Workplan 2020-2022.</b>	12 - 13

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Huw Evans'.

Huw Evans  
Head of Democratic Services  
Thursday, 15 April 2021

Contact: Democratic Services – Tel: (01792) 636923

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# Agenda Item 3



City and County of Swansea

## Minutes of the **Economy, Environment & Infrastructure Policy Development Committee**

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Thursday, 18 March 2021 at 2.00 pm

**Present:** Councillor C Anderson (Chair) Presided

**Councillor(s)**

J E Burtonshaw  
P K Jones  
P Lloyd

**Councillor(s)**

P Downing  
M A Langstone  
P M Matthews

**Councillor(s)**

P R Hood-Williams  
W G Lewis  
T M White

**Officer(s)**

Scott Dummett  
David Meyrick  
Carol Morgan  
Martin Nicholls  
Mark Wade  
Samantha Woon

Senior Lawyer  
Programme Planning & Delivery Manager  
More Homes Development Manager  
Director of Place  
Head of Housing & Public Health  
Democratic Services Officer

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**27 To receive Disclosures of Personal & Prejudicial Interests from Members.**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea, no interests were declared.

**28 Minutes:**

**Resolved** that the Minutes of the Economy, Environment and Infrastructure Policy Development Committee held on 18 February, 2021, be approved as a correct record.

**29 More Homes Strategy and Decarbonisation of Existing Housing Stock.**

The Head of Housing and Public Health, assisted by the Programme Planning and Delivery Manager for Council Investment and the More Homes Development Manager presented a report which outlined the More Homes Strategy and the emerging development programme for new council homes funded by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The report outlined current progress and future aspirations for the Council's development programme.

The report also outlined progress in achieving Welsh Housing Quality Standard, the approach to decarbonise the existing Council Housing stock, and the pilot schemes being designed to test principles and inform the future strategy.

Officers detailed the Background to the More Homes Strategy, More Homes Specification – The Swansea Standard, Completed Schemes and Current Activity, Future Schemes and Planned Activity, Background to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) and Decarbonisation, Past Energy Efficiency Delivery, Future Decarbonisation Programme – National Policy Development, Welsh Government Draft Decarbonisation Policy Proposals, Transitional Period – Decarbonisation Pilot Schemes, Proposed Future Decarbonisation Strategy and Future Opportunities, Challenges and Risks for the Council.

Officers referred to the presentation on Swansea Council Building Better Homes & Decarbonising Existing Homes. The presentation detailed:

- The More Homes Journey.
- Expected Benefits of Passivhaus.
- The Journey towards HAPS.
- The HAPS Concept.
- Swansea Standard Developments.
- HAPS Technologies.
- Outcomes.
- Current and Planned Activities.
- Decarbonising Existing Housing.
- WQHS Energy Efficiency Work.
- WGHS Energy Efficiency Investment.
- Energy Efficiency Improvements.
- Benefits of Energy Efficiency Programme.
- Insulated Render External Fabric Upgrade.
- Energy Efficiency External Fabric Upgrade.
- Future Decarbonisation Policy Development.
- Draft Decarbonisation Policy Proposals.
- Decarbonisation Targets.
- Decarbonisation Pilot Schemes.
- Pilot Scheme Decarbonisation Specification.
- HaPS Whole House Retrofit at Ffordd Ellen.
- Retrofit Pilot at Ffordd Ellen – Before & After.
- Renewable Supply & Storage.
- Whole House Retrofit at Lon y Felin.
- Renewables at Lon y Felin.
- Adopted Retrofit Decarbonisation Strategy.
- Opportunities.
- Challenges.
- Risks.

The Cabinet Member for Energy and Service Transformation thanked Officers for their comprehensive report. Members' noted that there had been exceptional cross departmental working, in terms of the Swansea Standard.

The Cabinet Member stated that the WQHS had generated major investment of just under half a billion pound in 13500 Council homes which also creates significant improvements in terms of energy efficiency.

In addition to upskilling the workforce the Council are also working closely with local colleges to align their courses with renewable technologies which will be the jobs of the future.

Decarbonisation remained a huge challenge to the Council in terms of funding. Timing was also important as efforts needed to be concentrated on our investment in new homes and an estimated £350m in decarbonisation of existing homes.

The Cabinet Member for Energy referred to her role within the WLGA representing the Housing Cabinet Member.

In response to Member questions, the Cabinet Member and Officers stated that:

- Whilst there would be no further Passivhaus constructions, it was felt that the pilot had served as a good initial project and as a result decisions had been made to source materials locally, thus supporting local small to medium businesses. Additionally, procuring materials locally (within a 15 mile radius) reduced carbon footprint.
- Thermal upgrades had been undertaken and renewables would be commenced post 2025. The aim was to prioritise the remainder of properties that have not been upgraded. Whilst doing those properties PV panels and storage would be integrated. Low carbon heating solutions would be addressed later in the programme.
- In terms of cold bridging we also have to put this on the reveals and the heads to eliminate cold bridges. The insulating measures we put in place are consistent and there are no weakness in the insulation that we apply.
- There is a target in building regulations that sets out the number of air changes per hour required. Our Swansea Standard aims to improve that figure. In relation to Parc Y Helyg, details of those figures would be submitted to the Committee in due course.
- Air tightness aims to reduce and minimise draughts that can potentially get into a property and assists with the thermal performance and potential heat loss. In terms of air tightness, Passivhaus was 0.6, standard building regulations are around 10 and our Swansea Standard

is coming in at about 3.4/3.5 so the difference between Passivhaus and Swansea Standard is very small.

- The Welsh Government Strategy concentrates on housing stock in Wales as they feel they have greater control at being able to roll out decarbonisation programmes in social housing. They are hoping the programmes we deliver can be used to encourage the private sector going forward so that we believe they are looking at a target of 2035 for delivery of private sector housing.
- The Welsh Government are examining building regulations in relation to thermal efficiency on new build properties. It is imperative that there is a balance between build cost and resale value.
- Homes as Power Stations are yet to receive approval as a City Deal project and therefore no money is flowing in terms of this Project. It is anticipated that the business deal would be approved in the next 2-3 months by the UK and Welsh Government and our scheme would be part of that deal.
- Monitoring programme equipment was installed in Colliers Way 1, Colliers Way 2 and Parc y Helyg. However, there are no figures available due to the disruption created by COVID. New systems will provide more effective remote monitoring. Figures will be available when the Welsh School of Architecture can gain access to properties.
- Whilst acknowledging the HRA is complex and business plan is very intricate it does not reflect any future grants that may be accessed. The Council will be making representations to the Welsh Government for additional funding otherwise our priorities will be split between completing WQHS and the backlog of maintenance and repairs. It is illegal to borrow over capacity & put the HRA into debt. The Council cautiously retains the level of reserves that is appropriate.
- In terms of apprenticeships, 17 have been recruited this year with a total of 76 across all disciplines. The recruitment process had not solely been in connect with construction in terms of WQHS but is also connected to the education capital programme. Whilst a trade skills gap does exist, progress is being made to 'grow' our own talent. In addition to apprenticeships, the Council, housing associations and private developers employ unemployed individuals within communities. Current staff are trained to ensure there are appropriate numbers of staff to install and maintain the equipment in these properties thus creating and retaining as many of those jobs in the Swansea Bay area.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and Officers for their informative report.

**Resolved that:**

1. The Committee note the contents of the report and confirmed that the current policy context continued to be appropriate as the council developed its decarbonisation strategy of its housing stock.

**30 Work Plan 2020-2022.**

The Chair referred to the work plan and requested that an additional item be included regarding the Citing of Bus Stops. The Director of Place stated that the Traffic Commissioner had responsibility for the citing of bus stops and this is not a policy the Council can set.

**Resolved that:**

- 1) The work plan be noted.
- 2) The Management and Maintenance of Open Space (Biodiversity & Tree Policy) be considered at the meeting on 22 April, 2021.
- 3) The Director of Place consider options regarding the Citing of Bus Stops.

The meeting ended at 3.50 pm

**Chair**

# Agenda Item 4



## Report of the Director of Place

### Economy, Environment & Infrastructure Policy Development Committee

22 April 2021

## Management and Maintenance of Open Space (Biodiversity)

<b>Purpose:</b>	To review the Council's management of its green infrastructure
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Swansea Council Corporate Priority: Maintaining and enhancing Swansea's natural resources and biodiversity
<b>Consultation:</b>	Access to Services, Finance, Legal, Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management, Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration & Tourism, Nature Conservation Team
<b>Recommendation(s):</b>	It is recommended that:  1) It is confirmed that the scope of this review is confined initially to the maintenance of grassed areas; and  2) The Parks Operations and Nature Conservation Teams liaise with Plantlife and other relevant organisations in a review of the Council's green space maintenance regime.  3) That a further report will be brought back to the PDC in due course setting out the proposed future policy context prior to seeking approval by Cabinet.
<b>Report Author:</b>	Jeremy Davies
<b>Finance Officer:</b>	Paul Roach
<b>Legal Officer:</b>	Scott Dummett
<b>Access to Services Officer:</b>	Rhian Miller

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Parks Service is responsible for maintaining the diverse range of Parks and Open Spaces within the City and County of Swansea. This service offers the community and visitors to Swansea locations the opportunity to enjoy recreational activities, improve health and well-being, participate in sports, relax, learn and play. The service is subdivided into sections each with a commitment to deliver a high quality, cost effective service.
- 1.2 The Council has committed to halt the loss of biodiversity, promote healthy resilient ecosystems, and strengthen green infrastructure to adapt to and mitigate for the impacts of climate change, and ensure that our natural environment and the benefits and services it provides are protected for the benefit of future generations
- 1.3 This report summarises current maintenance practices and strives to offer areas of consideration on how the Council could manage its green spaces differently to achieve the corporate priority of maintaining and enhancing Swansea's natural resources and biodiversity - so that we maintain and enhance biodiversity, reduce our carbon footprint, improve our knowledge and understanding of our natural environment and benefit health and well-being.

## **2. Scope**

- 2.1 The scope of this report:
  - Encompasses the main greenspace areas maintained by the Parks Service Area namely parks, roadside verges, housing and school land, green amenity spaces etc.
  - Considers the needs of these spaces.
  - Identifies the current maintenance regimes.
  - Explores the potential range of alternative ways to maintain.

## **3. Roadside verges**

- 3.1 The importance of roadside verges, as an integral part of the Highway network, is to provide strips for services, soft edges to highways for safety and aesthetic reasons, and vision splays at junctions and bends.
- 3.2 Currently urban roadside verges, where there are often a high level of pedestrians, are cut on average 9 times a year using ride on mowers. Areas around street furniture and trees etc. used to be sprayed to keep grass short, however predominantly these areas are now strimmed periodically through the cutting season. This does result in longer grass at these locations, but significantly reduces the use of herbicide.



- 3.3 Rural verges, where there are generally far less pedestrian movements, are cut twice a year using tractor mounted flails. Vision splays are still cut on average 9 times a year for highway safety and all grass is currently left to lie.
- 3.4 Roadside verges do hold the potential to be an effective tool for increased biodiversity and pollinator conservation with a revised maintenance regime. The Council could identify areas where verges, or sections of verges could be safely and aesthetically acceptably, be left to grow longer to facilitate pollinators and a wider variety of plant life.
- 3.5 A UK observational study of mown roadside verges found that on average they had 67% less flowers and 61% fewer pollinators across the summer season, compared to unmown verges. Another experimental study found that the combination of 2 cuts per year and removal of grass cuttings ('cut and collect') resulted in the greatest flower species richness, density and pollinator density. Other studies provide evidence on the benefits of delayed mowing (late summer) and partially mowed verges (1m strip).
- 3.6 Plantlife are a British conservation charity who work both nationally and internationally to conserve native flowers, plants and fungi. Their most recent roadside verge campaign aims to work with local authorities to restore roadside verges, create a practical management plan for roadside verges and generally support the introduction of diverse verges in both rural and urban areas. Consideration could be given to utilising their best practice and management tools in assessing the existing biodiversity value of the verges under our management as an important first step.

#### **4 Other grassed areas and amenity spaces**

- 4.1 The Parks Service also maintains a variety of Council owned green spaces and amenity land including parks, sports pitches, school grounds, cemeteries, Housing land, and other general estates land.
- 4.2 The cutting frequencies vary dependent upon the nature of the area. They vary from leaving areas uncut throughout the summer, with pathways cut through them, to cutting amenity areas 2 times a year. The cutting frequencies on sports pitches is on a needs basis.
- 4.3 Apart from fine turf management such as bowling greens and cricket squares, grass is not collected due to the high collection and disposal costs.
- 4.4 Demand for public parks has massively increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and has refocused our attention on the role they play in our society and 'nature got to shine'. Recent restrictions have demonstrated how vital parks and green spaces are for both physical health and mental wellbeing and their importance in delivering the active travel agenda.

- 4.5 Again the Council could identify grassed areas could be left to grow longer to facilitate pollinators and a wider variety of plant life, however a balance would have to be struck with other uses for the areas, including recreation, sports, tourism, and events.
- 4.6 Working with colleagues in Nature Conservation, cut and collect machinery has been purchased to aid in managing areas of long grass differently, with the aim of recreating native meadowland flora to encourage biodiversity and increase pollinator populations. This trial is a positive start, however a wider strategy would be required for it to be expanded further.

## **5 Potential areas for consideration for review**

5.1 Whilst consideration has to be given to alternative land uses, and the balance between the benefits of those uses and the benefits of increasing of biodiversity, the following are some examples which could be considered:

- Areas which are adjacent to hedges, woodland or other ecological corridors. A reduced frequency of cutting will maximise the benefits to wildlife
- Areas that contain trees. Limiting a full cut to twice per year will increase the benefits to wildlife
- Areas that already contain a higher number of wildflower species meaning they are important for biodiversity and regular cutting may prevent them from flowering and setting seed
- Larger urban verges that have low amenity value (eg. are not used for children's play)
- Slopes and banks which have low amenity value

5.2 Broad aims of a review:

- Managing our grass verges and open spaces with a balance of biodiversity and recreational space in mind. Promoting the native seed bank. Managing, not abandonment.
- Enable public access and enjoyment through path creation and citizen science projects – community engagement.
- Increase the number of grass verges/ parks/ cemeteries managed for pollinators year on year, where resource levels allow.

5.3 It is recommended that the Parks and nature Conservation Teams liaise with Plantlife to review the maintenance regimes for our grassed areas,

and feedback the range of practical options available, including their benefits, dis-benefits, and potential financial impacts.

## **6. General Issues**

- 6.1 There is a general perception that reduction in cutting regimes or alteration of practices yields an obvious saving, this is not necessarily the case.
- 6.2 Financial implications are generally unidentified at present due to surveying required prior to management planning however, several local authorities in Wales have undertaken or are in the process of undertaking trials and the consensus to date is that any alterations in maintenance regimes usually require capital investment initially. Revenue cost neutrality or savings varies depending on scale and type of open space. Overall there will be reduced costs in terms of purchasing chemicals and bedding plants, savings in staff time, and increase in biodiversity.
- 6.3 Any changes need to be communicated effectively with engagement, social media and signage to educate the public and reduce complaints.

## **7 Legal Issues**

- 7.1 There are no Legal issues arising from this report.

## **8. Integrated Assessment Implications**

- 8.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being and Future Generation Act 2015 Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage.
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language.
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2005 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic,

social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language

8.2 There has not been an IIA Screening undertaken for this initial "setting the scene" report, however IIAs will need to be considered for any proposed amendments to policies and procedures as an essential part of the review. The purpose of an impact assessment is to consider:

- Sustainability - analyse whether a proposal balances immediate needs with the well-being of future generations; and
- Equality - help officers and elected members to analyse policies and practices to determine whether they are likely to discriminate or disadvantage people. mitigation - if proposals will result in adverse impacts

**Background Papers:** Plantlife's: Managing Grassland Road Verges

**Appendices:** None

**Economy, Environment & Infrastructure PDC**  
**Work Plan - 2020 – 2022**

Date of Meeting	Report Title	Report Summary	Report Author
22 Apr 2021	<b>Management and Maintenance of Open Space. (Biodiversity).</b>	To identify how the Council could manage its green space differently e.g. grass cutting in parks, green spaces and grass verges to maximise biodiversity, while ensuring the City remains visually attractive.	
Page 12	<b>Annual Report.</b>		
	<b>Future City Wide Workforce.</b>	We will consider what has changed and what the future plans are for the city and identify good practice and examples of how training and skills can be connected through universities and colleges with business and manufacturing.	
	<b>Street Lighting Policy.</b>		Stuart Davies
	<b>Llwybr-Newydd (the new Wales Transport Strategy).</b>		Stuart Davies

**Economy, Environment & Infrastructure PDC**  
**Work Plan - 2020 – 2022**

Date of Meeting	Report Title	Report Summary	Report Author
	<b>Grey Fleet Policy.</b>		Stuart Davies
	<b>Speed Humps, do they cause damage to: existing road Surfaces, and do they add to air pollution?</b>	To identify how speed humps affect the community, road surfaces and affect air pollution.	Stuart Davies
Page 13	<b>Green Fleet Policy.</b>	Development of an EV Farm. Charging Networks. Investment in Home Charging Kits.	Stuart Davies
	<b>Economic Recovery Plan.</b>		Phil Holmes
	<b>High Street Regeneration.</b>		
	<b>Citing of Bus Stops.</b>		
	<b>More Homes Housing and De-carbonisation Strategy.</b>	How is the council providing more affordable and energy efficient homes as part of its Housing Revenue Account.	Mark Wade