



City and County of Swansea

Notice of Meeting

You are invited to attend a Meeting of the

Gower AONB Partnership Steering Group

At: Remotely via Microsoft Teams

On: Monday, 5 July 2021

Time: 2.00 pm

Chair: Councillor Paul Lloyd

Membership:

Councillors: M C Child, P R Hood-Williams, L James, A H Stevens and M Thomas

Steering Group Members: R Button, J Chambers, J France, S Heard, G Howe, P Jenkins, H Osborn, B Parry, P Thornton and D P Tucker

Watch Online: <https://bit.ly/3gWkCb8>

Agenda

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Next Meeting: Monday, 4 October 2021 at 2.00 pm

Huw Evans

Huw Evans
Head of Democratic Services
Monday, 28 June 2021

Contact: Democratic Services: - 636923

Agenda Item 4



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Gower AONB Partnership Steering Group**

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Monday, 15 March 2021 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor P Lloyd (Chair) Presided

Councillors

M C Child

J P Curtice

P R Hood-Williams

L James

Steering Group Members

R Button

J France

S Heard

G Howe

P Jenkins

H Osborn

B Parry

P Thornton

Also Present

J Burgess

Gower Society

Officer(s)

Paul Meller

Natural Environment Section Manager

Chris Lindley

Gower AONB Team Leader

Mike Scott

Gower AONB Officer

Jeremy Parkhouse

Democratic Services Officer

Apologies for Absence

Councillors: A H Stevens

Steering Group Members: J Chambers, S Hill and D P Tucker

12 Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea, the following interests were declared: -

R Button, J France, S Heard, G Howe, P Jenkins, B Parry and P Thornton declared personal and prejudicial interests in Minute No.20 – Election of Non-Councillor Steering Group Members and left the meeting prior to any discussions on this item.

13 Minutes.

Resolved that the Minutes of the Steering Group Meeting held on 30 November 2020 be approved as a correct record.

14 Presentation - Improving Community and Visitor Resources at Port Eynon.

Niall Maxwell and Will Judge of the Rural Office for Architecture Ltd provided a detailed and informative presentation regarding Improving Community and Visitor Resources at Port Eynon. The following was discussed: -

- Plan of the concerned area in Port Eynon;
- Development Brief;
- Accommodation Schedule;
- Programme;
- Key Sites Move;
- Reroute Traffic: Travel and Transport;
- Public Realm;
- Beach Connection;
- Parade – Community & Commercial;
- Play & Seasonal Activity;
- Feedback Themes;
- Balance of the Brief – Community;
- Overview – Options 1 to 5;
- Village Hall Proposals;
- Vision.

The Steering Group discussed the following: -

- Consultation process, including groups / individuals consulted with, the ongoing consultation with local groups / businesses, the need to consult with the wider community surrounding the area, consultation with holiday makers / visitors, the effect of COVID 19 upon the ability to consult in person and planned engagement events;
- Transport provision, particularly parking spaces, disabled access, access for horses to the beach, proposal to remove parking from the public realm area leading to the beach, park and ride possibilities similar to those used in other areas e.g. Cornwall, narrow access issues particularly on the corner near the Church, huge traffic problems encountered by Rhossili in recent years and avoiding similar problems in Port Eynon;
- Concern regarding the proposed level of commercialism of the project, enhancing the current facilities, options 1 to 5, how revenue is required to finance aspects of the development, the poor standard of the current facilities, the opportunity to introduce new facilities which would enhance the area and extend the hours of the day / extend the tourism and visitor season.

The Chair thanked the Rural Office for Architecture Ltd representatives for their presentation and looked forward to being further updated.

15 Update - Parking on Cefn Bryn.

Chris Lindley, Gower AONB Team Leader provided an update report regarding parking on Cefn Bryn.

It was outlined that the scope of works agreed with the landowner, Cefn Bryn Commoners, Natural Resources for Wales (NRW) and Swansea Council Highways comprised of:

- Roadside bunding
- An area for road vehicle pull-in; a crescent-shaped arrangement of boulders on the common, centred around the two points where vehicles have typically left/entered the highway; this will allow vehicles to park up to 15 yards off the highway; and
- a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) creating a clearway along the road from Cilbion to Reynoldston.

The Council received formal SSSI assent for the works from NRW on 29 January 2021, the physical works started 3 February and were completed before the end of February. It was added that the TRO process was in hand, and if there were no objections, should be in place later in the spring.

Resolved that the contents of the report be noted.

16 Progress Report - Sustainable Landscapes, Sustainable Places Programme.

The Gower AONB Team Leader provided a progress report on the Sustainable Landscapes, Sustainable Places.

It was explained that in addition to the works on Cefn Bryn, the Welsh Government SLSP Programme of capital funding for AONBs and National Parks had enabled the following Gower projects in 2021/22: -

- Purchase of battery-powered chainsaws and other countryside management tools for use in Gower AONB;
- Access, Heritage improvements and interpretation in Clyne Valley Country Park;
- Access improvements within Bishop's Wood Local Nature Reserve including a sustainable drainage system to avoid flooding and erosion to the path network.

It was added that all of these projects were either completed or were expected to be completed in the first quarter of the 2021/22 financial year. Welsh Government had indicated that further funding was available for the forthcoming 2021/22 financial year and the Gower AONB Team were developing project proposals with partners for consideration / approval of Welsh Government and the National Designated Landscapes Partnership (NDLP). These projects will included:

- Further public access and heritage improvements in Clyne Valley Country Park;
- Nature recovery and grazing management on Fairwood Common;
- Improvements to the visitor facility and heritage in Port Eynon and Horton.

Details on the projects agreed through the NDLP would be reported at the next scheduled meeting.

The Steering Group discussed the nature recovery and grazing management on Fairwood Common project and it was commented that the addition of road safety signs was a very positive development.

Resolved that the contents of the report be noted.

17 Update - Gower AONB Management Plan.

The Gower AONB Team Leader provided an update report on the Gower AONB Management Plan.

It was reported that the Gower AONB Management Plan was adopted by Swansea Council in March 2017 and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 required the plan to be reviewed every five years.

To oversee the preparation of the revised Management Plan, the AONB Partnership Steering Group established a Management Plan sub-group in 2019. The sub-group last met in January 2020 and established a review process and timeline. The sub-group were due to report back to the main group in the March 2020 meeting; however that meeting was abandoned due to Covid-19 and work on the management plan was suspended due to other pressures on both sub-group members and officers.

The membership of the sub-group was provided and it was added that the AONB Team were now in a position to resume work on the revised Management Plan. Table 1 of the report broadly outlined the process and outputs required to get an adopted, reviewed Management Plan.

The Steering Group discussed resuming this work and reviewed the membership of the sub-group.

Resolved that the Sub-Group proceeds with resuming the review of the Management Plan and the current membership be retained.

18 Dark Sky Monitoring Report.

The Gower AONB Team Leader reported that as part of Gower AONB's pending application for Dark Sky Community Award with the International Dark Sky Association (IDA), it was required to undertake annual monitoring of sky quality within the AONB.

The latest of these was undertaken on the evening of 9 January 2021. The survey period was moonless and was for the most part cold and clear with excellent visibility, with only light cloud early on during the first part of the survey. Sky Quality Meters (SQMs) were used to collect readings at 42 locations across Gower. SQM readings were converted to Naked Eye Limiting Magnitude (NELM) for ease of understanding. Annex 1 provided a summary table of results from 2019-2021 for comparison.

It was explained that the 2021 results for Gower appeared broadly comparable with the results of previous years. Locations furthest west, further from Swansea and less-populated, were consistent in producing the best readings. Readings at monitoring points from Bracelet Bay westward along south Gower, were all poorer than in previous years, but with no apparent cause. Monitoring in 2022 would consider this further.

It was added that these monitoring reports would form part of the Gower AONB formal application to the IDA for the Dark Sky Community Award, which was pending whilst the revision of Gower AONB Design Guide was completed and adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

The Steering Group queried the slow progress and it was explained that the Council had to follow the correct procedures, including consultation. It was added that improvement works were ongoing, particularly in relation to street lighting and an improvement plan was in place.

Resolved that the contents of the report be noted.

19 Sustainable Development Fund - Financial Summary.

Mike Scott, Gower AONB Officer presented the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) Panel Financial Summary report 'for information'.

It was confirmed that the SDF budget for 2020/21 was £100,000. There were currently 19 projects approved with SDF funding for 2020/21, which had committed the full funding available for this financial year.

A total of 8 potential projects had been withdrawn this year, with two more current projects needing to be rescheduled as a result of the impact of Covid 19. The Committed Funds figure included the CCS Management Fee of £10,000 (10%).

Total Funds available	£ 100,000
Committed Funds	£ 100,000
Uncommitted Funds	£ 0
Applications in progress	£ 0

Grant Scheme 2021/22

The budget for 2021/22 had not been confirmed, but Welsh Government had indicated it was likely to be £100,000. 8 projects had been approved, with £46,781 committed and currently £53,219 remained uncommitted.

20 Election of Non-Councillor Steering Group Members.

Note: - All non-Councillor / Natural Resources Wales representatives left the meeting prior to discussions on this item.

Jeremy Parkhouse, Democratic Services Officer provided a report which presented the options available to the Steering Group in respect of the forthcoming election of non-Councillor Steering Group Members.

It was outlined that as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Gower AONB Partnership Annual Meeting was cancelled in June 2020. Steering Group meetings had continued to be held online and the meeting on 15 March 2021 was the fourth meeting held via Microsoft Teams.

It was added that the Annual Meeting for 2021-2022 had been scheduled for 5 July 2021 and was due to include the election of non-Councillor Steering Group Members. However, due to the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions, it would be difficult to appoint via a remote meeting and it remained uncertain whether face to face meetings would resume by that date.

It was proposed that the term of office of non-Councillor Steering Group Members be extended by a year and their election deferred to 2022. This would also see their election fall in line with the Local Government Elections. It was also proposed that the membership of non-Councillor Members to the Sustainable Development Fund Panel and Sustainable Development Fund Appeals Panel be extended by a year and their election deferred to 2022.

Resolved that: -

- 1) the term of office of non-Councillor Steering Group Members be extended by 1 year and their election be deferred to the 2022-23 Municipal year;
- 2) the membership of non-Councillor Members to the Sustainable Development Fund Panel and Sustainable Development Fund Appeals Panel be extended by a year and their election deferred to 2022.

The meeting ended at 3.45 pm

Chair

Agenda Item 5a



Report of the Gower AONB Officer

Gower AONB Partnership Steering Group – 5 July 2021

Sustainable Development Fund – Financial Summary

Sustainable Development Fund – Financial Summary

Welsh Government have confirmed the SDF budget for 2021/22 at £100,000.

14 projects have been approved so far, with £88,000 committed, and one further application currently under consideration for £12,000.

The Committed Funds figure includes the CCS Management Fee of £7,500.55.

Total Funds available	£100,000
Committed Funds	£88,000
Uncommitted Funds	£12,000
Applications in progress	£12,000

If the application is approved at the Grants Panel meeting on 28th June, this will fully commit the SDF grant scheme budget for 2021/22.

Mike Scott,

24 June 2021



Report of the Gower AONB Officer

Gower AONB Partnership Steering Group – 5 July 2021

Proposed Amendments to SDF Grants Panel Terms of Reference

Following discussions with Welsh Government, we are considering some changes to the Terms Of Reference governing the SDF Grants Panel.

These changes are aimed at ensuring that the membership of the panel is diverse, and that they well placed to implement the Sustainable Grant Scheme locally.

Welsh Government - Key Recommendations for SDF Panels

- 1) The SDF panel should consist of a diverse demographic of members, with representation from the AONB's Partnership where required.
- 2) Any pre-existing membership arrangements; where for example an SDF panel member is also required to sit on an AONB Partnership panel, should not be dissolved. *This requirement can over-rule point 3 covering maximum term if necessary.*
- 3) Panel members should serve for a minimum of 2 years and for no longer than 3 years, with any new panel members shadowing the exiting member for 1 year.
- 4) Panel appointment should be through a rolling programme carried out by the AONB staff with no more than one third of the panel being replaced in any one year.
- 5) Panel members are required to undertake basic training to keep themselves abreast of the aims and purposes of the SDF and the AONB.

Our intention is that the AONB Steering Group remains central to the governance of the AONB Partnership, and that appointments to the SDF Grants Panel (and the SDF Appeals Panel) would be agreed and implemented through the Steering Group.

The proposed amendments to the Terms of Reference will be brought to the Steering Groups next meeting for approval.

Mike Scott,

24th June 2021

Agenda Item 6



Report of the Gower AONB Team Leader

Gower AONB Partnership Steering Group – 5 July 2021

Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places – Award of Grant and Identified Projects

The AONB Steering Group March 2021 meeting was advised that the Gower AONB Team were developing project proposals with partners for consideration / approval of Welsh Government and the National Designated Landscapes Partnership (NDLP) and that details on the projects agreed through the NDLP would be reported at the next scheduled meeting.

The attached paper at Appendix 1 prepared for Swansea Council Cabinet meeting on 17 June 2021 provides further details on the grant and the proposed projects.

Background Papers: None.

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Cabinet Paper – 17 June 2021

Chris Lindley

Gower AONB Team Leader

28 June 2021



Report of the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement and Infrastructure Management

Cabinet - 17 June 2021

Sustainable Landscapes, Sustainable Places (SLSP) and Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) – Gower AONB – Offer of Additional Welsh Government Funding

<p>Purpose:</p>	<p>To seek Cabinet approval to accept two offers of funding from Welsh Government for specified projects totalling £325,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rule 5.7 The funding is offered at 100% of project costs, with no match funding required.</p>
<p>Policy Framework:</p>	<p>SLSP: Funding of £225,000 - the purpose is to support the following capital projects during 2021/22:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clyne Valley Country Park Regeneration • Fairwood Common – Sustainable Management • Improvements in Port Eynon & Horton • Reynoldston and Cefn Bryn access • Pennard Castle <p>The projects were developed by the Gower AONB Partnership through the Welsh Government “Sustainable Landscapes, Sustainable Places” scheme, and the National Designated Landscapes Partnership (NDLP).</p> <p>SDF: Funding of £100,000 – the purpose is to operate the Sustainable Development Fund grant scheme within the AONB on behalf of Welsh Government. The fund aims, through partnership, to support projects that work to conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife, landscape, land use, culture and community on Gower.</p>
<p>Consultation:</p>	<p>Local Members, Access to Services, Finance, Legal</p>

Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that:
1)	Approval is given to accept both offers of funding (totalling £325,000) from Welsh Government, to enable the projects to be developed and delivered within 2021/22.
Report Author:	Chris Lindley
Finance Officer:	Liz Bennett
Legal Officer:	Caritas Adere
Access to Services Officer:	Rhian Millar

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Welsh Government - through the “Sustainable Landscapes, Sustainable Places” (SLSP) programme for Welsh AONBs and National Parks - has made a grant offer of 100% funding towards five projects, based upon discussions with the Gower AONB Team. The funding totals £225,000 and is for implementation in 2021/22.
- 1.2 In addition, the Welsh Government has made an offer of £100,000 to enable Gower AONB Partnership to continue the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) grant scheme, during 2021/22. This is also funded at 100%, and is administered according to guidelines set out by Welsh Government.
- 1.3 The projects and funding all lend support and contribute to the Welsh Government’s “Valued and Resilient” priorities for the Welsh AONBs and National Parks, as well as Council policies contained within the LDP and the Gower AONB Management Plan. The projects improve the provision of local access to green spaces and their sustainable management.
- 1.4 The projects will be coordinated by the Natural Environment Section, with works being implemented by agreement with other Council teams and appropriate local stakeholders. Officers are drawing up detailed specifications and work plans for each project.

2.0 SLSP Programme (£225,000) - Project outlines

- 2.1 **Clyne Valley Country Park (£50,000)** is a continuation of last year’s works to improve the Country Park and its sustainable management. The Country Park - on the eastern fringe of Swansea - is one of the largest contiguous areas of land in the stewardship of Swansea Council (over 300ha). Clyne Valley has multiple special features and assets (historical and ecological) and is an area easily accessible to much of the city’s population. Several visitor attractions and assets operate adjacent to the

Country Park, including Blackpill Lido, Clyne Gardens, the Railway Inn, and Clyne Farm Centre.

- 2.2 Welsh Government support in 2020/21 funded capital works and improvements to the network of footpaths and bridleways, including the installation of new and replacement bridge structures. Heritage assets have also been improved/restored and interpreted.
- 2.3 Further heritage and access improvements will be undertaken in 2021/22. Nature Recovery actions will focus on further Invasive Non- Native Species control – particularly control of Rhododendron on the west side of the valley, and treatment of Japanese Knotweed along watercourse corridors.
- 2.4 **Fairwood Common (£50,000)** - Fairwood Common is one of the largest areas of open common land in AONB at 524ha. Owned by Swansea Council, it is used for livestock grazing by a declining number of commoners. Fairwood Common is part of Gower Commons SAC and is also SSSI and SINC - with a mosaic of bog, wet and dry heath, ponds, scrub, and woodland habitats.
- 2.5 The Common surrounds Swansea Airport and there is extensive public open access. Fairwood Common is the gateway to Gower and a first feature for many people entering Gower from Swansea – certainly one of Gower’s iconic open commons. However, there are long standing issues which are leading to the deterioration of this iconic Gower landscape – issues around a lack of graziers (and barriers to releasing livestock out on the common), wildfires, increasing scrub cover and loss of biodiversity and ecological resilience.
- 2.6 This project aims to tackle these problems, by equipping those involved to reverse some of the changes, improving public access facilities, and by raising awareness amongst visitors and locals of the important role that the commons play.
- 2.7 **Pennard Castle (£30,000)** - Pennard Castle is a Scheduled Monument owned by Pennard Golf Club, who manage their golf course on Pennard Common. The Common is Access Land, with a network of rights of way and other routes (including links to the Wales Coast Path) that make Pennard Castle easily accessible for local communities and visitors. Pennard Castle overlooking Three Cliff Bay is one of the most instantly recognisable images of Gower and the area receives high numbers of visitors, particularly so in 2020. Undesirable visitor behaviour – including climbing on the castle walls and illicit fires within the castle walls – is a cause for concern for the Scheduled Monument condition.
- 2.8 This project will work with Pennard Golf Club to deliver capital works on improving three main aspects:
- The physical condition of the Scheduled Monument

- Community/visitor engagement to communicate the value of the castle and its landscape – and how to look after it – including interpretation assets and events
 - Access and waymarking improvements of routes toward and around the castle
- 2.9 **Port Eynon & Horton (£75,000)** - A 2019 feasibility study commissioned by Swansea Council started the comprehensive assessment of the foreshore and the management of the area for visitors. The carparks and toilet blocks at both sites, along with the slipway at Port Eynon, are owned by Swansea Council. The authority also manages the dune system which extends from Port Eynon to Horton and the Salt House Scheduled Monument.
- 2.10 The study found that Port Eynon is under considerable pressure during the height of the season and the main issues relate to: the management of the carpark; inadequate quality of the toilets; traffic congestion; and boat launching. There were also concerns about the large number of signs on the seafront, the road layout near the disabled car parking bays and the quality of the litter bins. In summary, Port Eynon appears neglected and under resourced and continues to deteriorate.
- 2.11 The main issues for Horton village are car parking, the condition of the toilet block, pedestrian access to the beach, the condition of boardwalks and the interpretation of the dunes.
- 2.12 Complementary to the ongoing project developing the concept design of a new public building in Port Eynon, this SLSP project will enable some of the smaller scale public realm improvements for Port Eynon and Horton as identified in the feasibility study recommendations.
- 2.13 **Reynoldston/Cefn Bryn Public Access (£20,000)** - This project is for public access and interpretation, improving the links between Reynoldston village and the historic landscape of Cefn Bryn. Reynoldston village is a popular visitor destination on Gower, with a busy pub, holiday accommodation and village shop. Cefn Bryn Common - the central ridgeline and historic landscape dominating the Gower skyline - lies immediately above and adjacent to the village, with Arthur's Stone (Neolithic burial chamber and one of the key historic features) just a short (under 1-mile) walk across the common.
- 2.14 Recent works to limit off-road parking at the summit of Cefn Bryn (completed by SLSP in 2020-21) – whilst completely necessary - are expected to increase the number of visitors stopping in Reynoldston and wanting to get to Arthur's Stone. Although there is open access across the common and a network of rights of way, routes are poorly surfaced, with little waymarking towards features of interest. There is no on-site visitor information on the historic landscape and its archaeological features, nor the importance of the common for biodiversity and its grazing management.

- 2.15 This project will plan, enable, and implement footpath improvements and waymarking between the Reynoldston and the historic landscape of Cefn Bryn. The project will also plan and enable interpretation and visitor engagement/information on the area.

3.0 Sustainable Development Fund Grant Scheme (£100,000)

- 3.1 The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) provides grants for innovative, sustainable, environmental projects, which involve local communities in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), and National Parks. The SDF aims, through partnership, to support projects that work to conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife, landscape, land use, culture and community on Gower.
- 3.2 The grant scheme (now in its 20th year) is administered locally by the Gower AONB Partnership, on behalf of Welsh Government. A grant panel, which includes Councillors and other local representatives, oversees the scheme. The Welsh Government funding for the scheme includes a 10% management fee to cover the Council costs.

4.0 Legal Implications

- 4.1 The Council must comply with the grant offer terms and conditions and must ensure that any procurement of goods, works or services complies with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and Procurement Regulations.

5.0 Integrated Assessment Implications

- 5.1 The Council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Wales) and must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - 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.
 - Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

- 5.2 Integrated impact assessments (IIAs) are a legal requirement within both the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being and Future Generation Act 2015 Welsh Language (Wales) Measure. The legal obligations put a specific requirement on us to undertake integrated impact assessments (IIA) as a way of examining whether a new or existing function, service, policy, procedure, strategy, plan or project affects any person or group of persons adversely.
- 5.3 An IIA Screening Form has been completed with the agreed outcome that the acceptance of the offer of Welsh Government funding does not require a full IIA report. The individual projects will be subject to individual IIA screening, once more details are available. The Welsh Government offer is specifically for these projects, which are fundamentally to address existing maintenance and safety issues. In developing the projects, the increased provision of access and the removal of barriers will be a fundamental consideration. The recognition of “least restrictive option” approaches is fundamental to the work of the Teams involved, leading to the provision of “all-ability access” wherever possible. Our approach will ensure that consultation takes place at the most appropriate stage.

6.0 Financial Implications

- 6.1 The Authority already has responsibilities in these areas, and this offer of funding will assist the Council in achieving its ambitions as set out in a number of plans and policies (for example the Local Development Plan and the Gower AONB Management Plan). The funding has been offered at 100% and is expected to cover the costs of the projects.

Background Papers: None

Appendices:

- Appendix A - SLSP Grant Offer Letter 2021/22
- Appendix B - SLSP IIA Scoping Report
- Appendix C - SDF Grant Offer Letter 2021/22
- Appendix D - SDF IIA Scoping Report

Agenda Item 7



Report of the Gower Society

Gower AONB Partnership Steering Group – 5 July 2021

Gower Society - Woodland Project Proposal

The Gower Society will be celebrating the 75th Year since its first, and formation meeting, in 1923. The Founder Meeting was held in the Royal Institution in January 1948.

We are minded to consider a project in partnership with others that produces a lasting and indelible positive impact upon the AONB. One project that we would like you to consider is the planting of a significant area of mixed woodland either on land that is designated or purchased specifically for the purpose. We would like to think that such a scheme, such as a new woodland, would encourage wildlife, replace trees lost through disease in the AONB, link up with other woodlands, reserves as well as being educational and accessible for all by cycle and public transport.

To this end we would like to attract, with others, considerable sums of money from Government and private sources that would make this a truly worthwhile and a National Welsh project. Your views would be greatly appreciated.

Guto Ap Gwent
Chairman Gower Society Committee

Agenda Item 8



Report of the Gower AONB Team Leader
Gower AONB Partnership Steering Group – 5 July 2021
Roadside Verge Management

Roadside Verge Management

Steering Group members have raised the matter of highway verge management within the AONB and have asked for this to be discussed at the next meeting.

For context, attached at Appendix 1 is a paper considered by the Swansea Council Economy, Environment and Infrastructure Policy Development Committee on 22 April 2021 considering these matters.

Background Papers: None.

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Management & Maintenance of Open Space (Biodiversity) - Economy and Infrastructure Policy Development Committee 22 April 2021.

Chris Lindley

Gower AONB Team Leader

28 June 2021



Report of the Director of Place

Economy and Infrastructure Policy Development Committee -
22 April 2021

Management and Maintenance of Open Space (Biodiversity)

Purpose:	To review the Council's management of its green infrastructure
Policy Framework:	Swansea Council Corporate Priority: Maintaining and enhancing Swansea's natural resources and biodiversity
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance, Legal, Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management, Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration & Tourism, Nature Conservation Team
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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
Report Author:	Jeremy Davies
Finance Officer:	Paul Roach
Legal Officer:	Scott Dummett
Access to Services Officer:	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 sub-divided 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 14 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

Note: Background Papers are not printed. However, they are open for public inspection and must therefore be made available on request by the Report Author. Background Papers are those documents relating to the subject matter of the report which:

- a) Disclose any facts or matters on which, in the opinion of the Proper Officer, the report or an important part of the report is based; and
- b) Have, in his opinion, been relied on to a material extent in preparing the report.

Appendices: None

Agenda Item 9



Report of the Gower AONB Officer

Gower AONB Partnership Steering Group – 5 July 2021

Informal Camping and Overnight Parking

Informal Camping and Overnight Parking

Like many parts of the UK, Gower has seen continuing growth in visitor number over the past few years – and this has been increased by the effects of COVID 19 restrictions on overseas travel during 2020, and 2021.

Many places on Gower have issues with two particular types – camping and overnight parking by motorhomes or campervans. In most cases, it is not so much the presence of those involved, it is usually the associated anti-social behaviour (noise, environmental damage, litter, etc.). Sometimes it happens because visitors cannot find official camping sites – more often it is a deliberate choice.

The legal situation can be complex, and differs between locations and types.

Frequently used terminology:

- Wild Camping – traditionally this type of camping is lightweight, done in small numbers and only for two or three nights in any one place, usually as part of a walking or cycling trip. Technically a civil offence rather than a legal one, it has sometimes been tolerated by landowners, usually being discrete and leaving no trace.
- Informal or Freedom Camping – widely adopted terms for overnight parking or camping on the roadside, either in vehicles or tents. On the highway, this is legal, but on private land, it may be a civil offence.
- Dirty Camping - where people commit other offences such as littering, causing environmental damage (e.g. driving on sensitive vegetation or cutting trees for fires) or cause disturbance or nuisance to others. This may be a civil offence, but is more likely to be a criminal one.

The main issue is how these different situations are dealt with – as civil offences, the responsibility rests with the landowner. The addition of anti-social behaviour would attract the possible involvement of the Police – but it is often a low priority. They all frequently take a good deal of time to resolve, usually at weekends or in the evenings, by their nature.

Previously the AONB Ranger and local Police mounted regular joint patrols to “hot spots” – however, neither organisation have the resources to do this at present.

The AONB Team, working with partners, recently dealt with informal camping on Cefn Bryn by limiting vehicle access. The same approach may have to be taken elsewhere. The measures taken to address the issues are rarely simple, quick or cheap – it is often simply moved to another site. They also impact on other users.

The cumulative effect of informal camping (and particularly dirty camping) can be huge on local communities – experiencing repeated anti-social behaviour and damage / littering. It is often beyond individual landowners capacity to address the issues, and is best tackled on a partnership approach.

Mike Scott,
25th June 2021