

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

MINUTES OF THE GOWER AONB PARTNERSHIP GROUP

HELD AT COMMITTEE ROOM 2 - CIVIC CENTRE, SWANSEA ON
MONDAY, 4 AUGUST 2014 AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor R Francis-Davies (Chair) presided

Councillor(s): **Councillor(s):** **Councillor(s):**

M C Child

J P Curtice

J E C Harris

Representing Organisations:

R Button - Tourism Swansea Bay
S Heard - Gower Riding Club/Port Eynon Community Council
Community Councillor - Upper Killay Community Councils
P R Hood-Williams
G Howe - Gower Society
P Lanfear - Gower Commoners Association
A Woodman - Forestry and Farming
Community Councillor - Llanrhidian Higher Community Council
R Cooper

Officers:

R Thomas - Planning Control Manager
K Flanders - Planning Policy and Environment Manager
P Williams - Housing and Public Protection
M Scott - Gower AONB Officer
J Parkhouse - Democratic Services Officer

Also Present:

A Glass - Penrice Community Council
H Jenkins - Resident
D Cowley - Llanrhidian Lower Community Council/
Cilibion Saw Mills
J Davies - Gelligroes Farm, Llanmorlais
E Button - Foxgloves, Rhossili
A Cowley - Dunraven Farm
A Cowley - Cilibion Saw Mills
L Mabbett - Manselfold Farm, Llanrhidian
D John - Manselfold Farm, Llanrhidian
M Cowley - Dunraven Farm, Burry Green
E Cowley - Dunraven Farm, Burry Green

Councillor L James - City and County of Swansea, Pennard Ward
J John - Manselfold Farm, Llanrhidian
S John - Manselfold Farm, Llanrhidian
R Daniels - Resident
K Daniels - Resident
A Perry - Resident

13. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor K E Marsh, B Parry, J Davies, C Daugherty, R Wright and P Holmes.

14. **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair welcomed all present to the Civic Centre, Swansea and commenced proceedings. He outlined that the Gower AONB Partnership Steering Group was not a policy making forum but it was an opportunity for the people who live and work on Gower to put their views forward regarding policies within the AONB.

The Planning Policy and Environment Manager added that the Local Development Plan had identified 520 houses within Gower and the Gower fringe that required building by 2025. She added that it was important that the majority of these were affordable housing as the Authority wanted socially balanced communities. She added that in a recent survey, 69% of Gower residents welcomed affordable housing being provided.

15. **DISCLOSURES OF PERSONAL AND PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS**

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

16. **DISCUSSION REGARDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING WITHIN THE AONB**

The Chair outlined that the purpose of this meeting was to facilitate a discussion regarding affordable housing within the Gower AONB. The Planning Policy and Environment Manager provided the definition of affordable housing as follows:

Discussions followed and centred around the following:

- The results of the Needs Survey on Gower and including affordable housing within windfall sites;

- There are potentially six sites in Gower/Gower fringe that had been identified within the LDP and these may be confirmed by Council in December 2014 and be circulated for consultation;
- Affordable housing properties have been extended or sold on in the past and therefore have become unaffordable. This has occurred with many affordable houses on Gower and a mechanism to prevent properties being sold on or extended, such as Section 106 Agreements, needs to be implemented;
- Concern was expressed for younger people working within the rural economy, such as farming and similar occupations, who could not afford to purchase their own homes on Gower. A number of barns within farm complexes had been converted into holiday accommodation when in reality, they should have been converted into homes for local agricultural based workers;
- Barn conversions are possible but the owners must provide a strategic economic use for the conversion. Council policy does allow for conversion to residential accommodation, however, the process is complicated and can be lengthy;
- The LDP policy is there to protect and enhance the Gower AONB but also be sympathetic to locals and must allow locals to live in the area. Section 106 agreements can tie people into properties in order to prevent them being sold on;
- Farm labourers still struggle to afford to purchase affordable housing. Agricultural workers should be allowed to build property or convert property within farms which would mean they would be on site to deal with daily issues in and around the farm business;
- It is important to recognise that small farms on Gower are viable and this has been proven over many years. If barns are converted into affordable housing for individuals working on Gower it will be a positive outcome as local people and businesses will be supported. Many local businesses had also been closed/run down deliberately in order to build more executive homes upon the sites and this should be prevented in future as it causes much ill-feeling on Gower;
- Buildings built in the future must comply with the Gower AONB Design Guide and it is important that these are appropriate for the AONB, including local people;

- Housing Associations that provide two and three bedroom properties require that all bedrooms must be filled in order for people to purchase the property. This makes it difficult for young couples who were yet to start a family to get onto the housing ladder;
- The farming population is aging and many wish to retire. However, in order to ensure that farms remain in families, it is important that the younger generation have affordable accommodation. At present, they have nowhere to go except sharing with the older generation;
- It is important that as many people as possible comment at the LDP consultation stage in order for views to be considered;
- Local circumstances should be able to deviate national policy. Special consideration should be given to farms and agricultural workers in order to provide affordable housing;
- Community Councils have little input into the planning process going forward;
- Only affordable housing is required on Gower as there is a sufficient amount of other housing available. However, if executive homes are built, affordable housing must be included in the planning application and developers must contribute towards affordable housing;
- The reason many affordable houses have disappeared on Gower is due to Section 106 Agreements being removed from properties or properties not being used correctly, which is a planning enforcement matter;
- Many families involved in agriculture wish to live and work on the same site, i.e. build their own properties upon their land;
- If agricultural workers are allowed to build new properties on their land, consideration must be given to what happens to the current farm dwellings and whether these should also be subject to Section 106 Orders. Many people on Gower have benefited from converting barns into holiday lets and it is difficult to control market forces;

- Section 106 Agreements need to be justified as the policy supports agricultural dwellings. However, it must be recognised that agriculture has changed and many businesses have diversified to allow local farms to continue in business. It is therefore difficult to tie properties to an agricultural Section 106 Agreement when businesses diversify;
- It must be recognised that the rural economy in Wales is under threat and local people must be allowed to live there, which will also allow them to work there. The whole Welsh rural economy is under threat;
- It is an incredibly difficult issue to develop local housing for local needs. It is extremely important that local people respond to the consultation process as this is the only way that policy can be altered;
- Second homes have a very negative impact upon village life as people make occasional visits and have very little input into the community. The initiative of charging full Council Tax on second homes being introduced by the Welsh Assembly Government may assist this situation;
- When new affordable houses are introduced they need to be maintained and kept as affordable housing. It must be recognised that the population of the UK is increasing, while agriculture is decreasing. More complex rules need to be introduced with regards to Section 106 Agreements;
- The agricultural population is ageing and in the very near future there will be no one to run the farms. Therefore, we need to keep the younger generation in accommodation and working within agriculture;
- The system of allocating Council houses should consider local needs;
- The Council needs more allocated land and to plan effectively for the future. There will be winners and losers and there must be other properties allocated as affordable houses. Social housing does have a place within the community.

Councillor P R Hood-Williams proposed that the Gower AONB Partnership forward a letter to the Welsh Assembly Government regarding this issue.

The Chair stated that the issue was for debate tonight and will be discussed at the next scheduled meeting in order to inform the LDP process. He urged people to forward details of possible sites that could be included within the LDP. Affordable housing is a target within the Labour manifesto and it is the policy of the current administration to deliver. The Council will have to make savings of nearly £80 million from its budget during the next three years and some decisions will be very difficult with the priorities being education and social services. The Authority is looking to dispose of surplus land and is looking very closely at its asset management.

AGREED that a further report be provided to the next scheduled meeting.

17. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

NOTED that the next meeting will be held at 7.00 p.m. on Monday 22 September 2014 at the Greyhound Inn, Old Walls, Llanrhidian, Swansea.

The meeting ended at 9.00 p.m.

CHAIR