



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA
DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

Councillor Mary Jones
City & County of Swansea

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MC/VHD

30th December 2015

**If you require this or any other information in another format
e.g. Braille, audio tape or a different language, please contact me**

Dear Cllr Jones,

In response to your letter of 20th October,

Local Area Co-ordination

Thank you for your interest in this area. The report on the first 3 months is now available, and covers the launch of this initiative. Your point about organisations such as the Fire and rescue service being involved is absolutely right, and we have held an event involving other statutory organisations, the third sector, RSLs and the University along to hear how LAC is being effective in other Authorities, and are now following that up with one to one contacts. The preventative agenda is something we all are faced with, all know it's a difficult nut to crack, but that working together we stand a much greater chance of success with the resources we are able to put in to it. It is pleasing that the Welsh Government have recently asked for more information on our work.

Best Start in Life.

This continues to be the area I feel the biggest long term difference can be made in outcomes for people in Swansea. It is an area we are working increasingly well with ABMU in, but resources remain low and insufficient to fully address it.

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Smoking

We have a massive issue with this in Swansea, and all efforts to address this are needed, and I think we need to be more sophisticated in our approach. I think the council has a significant role to play here alongside our Health colleagues and have asked Cllr Erika Kirchner to help develop this role through the Corporate Services cabinet Advisory Committee.

Open Space Strategy.

I have asked Cllr Dowling to help develop this with officers through the Development Cabinet Advisory Committee.

Commissioning Review and Finance.

This has now passed through the Cabinet in to phase 5 of the review, and a number of elements are now in the public domain as part of the Councils budget consultations.

Regarding Japanese Knotweed,

Natural Control Trials

The council was involved with the first phase of the natural control trial releases between 2011 and 2014 with the international research group CABI and it was the first ever such trial carried out in Europe. The Welsh Government helped fund the project. There were also several sites in England. The psyllid bug (a type of leaf hopper) was released at a release site and there was also a non-release control site both of which were monitored by CABI on a regular basis. The results are positive and confirmed that the bug had no negative impacts on surroundings plant and insect populations. Field trials are continuing in England only as at the present time there is no Welsh funding. It should be remembered that the bug will not eradicate the plant but will be a long term control option.

Information on the economic effects of Japanese Knotweed and other invasive species can be found in the publication of the CABI's report 'The Economic Cost of Invasive Non-Native Species on Great Britain' (attached) on behalf of WAG, DEFRA (the governments Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) and the Scottish government which was released in November 2010. This report highlights the economic costs of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) such as knotweed in Great Britain and acknowledges some of the work carried out here in Swansea.

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You may also be interested to know that the council are now involved with CABI again but this time with the natural control trials of a rust for the control of Himalayan balsam.

Private land and the role of the Council

Swansea probably has the biggest problem in the UK with the plant Japanese knotweed and the council survey in 1998 identified 250 acres of the plant throughout the City and County of Swansea area. The councils policy for dealing with knotweed at the present time is that if it is growing on council land then the relevant land holding department eg housing will be responsible for looking into the situation. If the knotweed is causing a problem then that department will arrange for the plant to be controlled by paying the parks department or perhaps an outside contractor to spray the knotweed over a number of years. A problem could include spreading into a garden or affecting the sale of a property. We do not 'remove' knotweed from site and this should not be confused with treatment or control which should always take place in situ. However if there is not a problem eg its growing in the middle of a wood or not spreading then it does not have to be controlled.

There is no dedicated council budget for the control of knotweed although departments do spend several thousand pounds a year dealing with the plant.

I am afraid that due to the scale of the problem in Swansea there is no timescale for the eradication of the plant within the county as a lot of the plant is on private land and the costs would run into millions of pounds.

The council has no real powers to enforce control of knotweed when it is on private land. Knotweed is classed as a controlled waste and must be disposed of at a licensed landfill site if taken off site and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 makes it an offence to cause the plant to spread in the wild (not into gardens or in urban areas). However both of these pieces of legislation are not dealt with by the local authority but by Natural Resources Wales and/or the police.

The Anti-social Behaviour, Crime & Policing Act 2014 does not mention knotweed and it only gives local authorities a power but not a legal duty to look into knotweed problems. The Home Office information issued is only guidance about how this act might be interpreted.

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The only real power the Council has is if the knotweed is causing a highways safety problem. If this is the case then the Highways dept can take action against the landowner to solve the problem.

The council has been working to deal with the knotweed problem in Swansea for many years and this includes the following initiatives;

- Large scale treatment schemes from 1993-2009 (mainly grant funded)
- Knotweed planning condition
- Knotweed Action Plan
- Knotweed officer
- Launch of the Knotweed Manual
- 'No knotweed' warning on garden waste bags
- Welsh natural control trials
- Parks dept launch a payable knotweed control service for the public
- On-going awareness raising

To help councillors further understand the issues associated with Japanese Knotweed a session was run for councillors on Thursday 26 Nov at 3pm in the Guildhall Council chamber.

From August of this year the Parks Service established its own trial knotweed team from within current resources, following Service Managers discussions we agreed to create a team of two to 'test' the water and see what sort of income we would hope to achieve.

Our initial aim was to cover the setting up costs to ensure the service is cost neutral, following the launch and various avenues of advertising we have received in excess of 190 request for quotations, of which we have been successful in obtaining 171 orders with an expected income figure of £44k, this falls just short of the cost of running the service.

The breakdown of the orders are 19 external and 152 from internal departments. Our quotations insist on a 3 year programme to treat and manage the knotweed, therefore the amount quoted above will be the minimum for the next 3 years, by which time we are confident the service will surpass its cost recovery, if needed we will obviously allocate additional resource to meet extra demands.

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It must be noted the income is from internal departments as well as private house owners. As commented we will invest any profits in knotweed treatment on Parks land alone, such profits will not be used against budget cuts.

At present due to the volume of knotweed across the City it is impossible to have a proactive approach to treating on Parks land or for that matter council land, our policy is to be reactive and treat when notified of any issues, the normal rule of thumb is to treat any knotweed within 7 metres of the properties boundary. For the record following publication of Infrastructure Act 2015 we have undertaken treatment on over 50 Park sites.

Allotments:

The Council presently has a policy not encouraging more allotments which are statutory managed growing spaces maintained by the Council and charged, but instead encouraging people to create growing spaces within their communities, which are community run and maintained without the need for a lease. As you say allotments and other growing spaces are positive for people's health and wellbeing. These facilities come under Cllr Evans – Communities and Anti-poverty portfolio, and I have asked Cllr Evans assistance in responding to this element of your letter.

In October 2014, in line with Sustainable Swansea – Fit for the Future and the requirement to make budget savings, a decision was taken to reduce the capacity of the Food and Growing Team and reduce the budget for the Grow Local grant scheme. As a result, Council support for community growing is now responsive, rather than proactive. There has been no active promotion of community growing in 2015/16 and requests for information and land are explored and responded to accordingly. In order to maximise limited resources, the Council works in partnership with Swansea Community Growing Network, the Community Land Advisory Service and Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens to continue to develop and support community growing in Swansea.

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- The Council provides an improved initial online point of contact that is free of jargon and encourages further interest – Yes. Requests for information and support are signposted to the following pages on the Council's website.

www.swansea.gov/foodandgrowing

www.swansea.gov.uk/growlocal

www.swansea.gov.uk/allotments

- Single indicators for community food growing and demand for plots are developed and updated regularly in order to chart progress. An indicator for Community Growing exists in the Council's Corporate Improvement Plan and is updated on a bi-annual basis. Demand for allotment plots is recorded by a waiting list.
- Usage and demand are mapped against geographic areas of the city and demographic groups. Based on data held, the geographic spread and demographic (based on eligibility for concession), on Council managed Allotment sites can be mapped.
- Usage is benchmarked against other areas. Usage of allotments is full on all sites and there are associated waiting lists on all sites. - Benchmarking of community growing spaces isn't possible as there is no national register for comparison.
- Swansea Voices is used to gauge potential further demand. - Due to the existence of a waiting list this is not done.
- Frontline staff in other departments / partner organisations are provided with information about the benefits of community food growing and details of who to signpost people to – Yes. Swansea is nationally recognised as a place where community growing is encouraged.
- Community food growing is promoted through a communications campaign including Swansea Leader. - This has reduced with the reduction in the Grow Local Grants this financial year.
- Community food growing is promoted to and through community and town councils. - This is still happening when requested

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- Councillors should also encourage other forms of recreational gardening and growing (e.g. flowerbeds, community orchards, etc.). - Yes and is happening.
Cycling

There are on-going conversations with the cycling fraternity about routes through the City centre, and these have been joined by other groups such as the partially sighted in an effort to ensure a fair, safe and enjoyable balance between all users.

May I also apologise for the delay in replying.

Yours Sincerely,

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