

What should Swansea Council be doing to maintain, enhance and promote its natural environment and biodiversity?

Why are we undertaking this inquiry?

- Every Council has a duty to enhance and maintain its natural environment and biodiversity
- It is important that the preservation and promotion of ecosystems is a top priority of the Council as it is in everyone's best interests.
- Most people are not aware of how reliant we are on ecosystems for provisions, regulation and culture.
- Although statistics don't always paint a picture – 70% of the principal habitats in Wales are found in Swansea, 50% of the UK priority species are found in Swansea and 50% of Swansea is made up of sites which are identified as important for nature conservation. This is astonishing and if we are not careful and do not encourage the enhancement of them these areas will deteriorate or disappear
- As is the case for all Councils, we face severe austerity. This means that money which we could have directed toward nature conservation in the past has now been used for other purposes. Teams have had cuts which have majorly impacted their ability to undertake essential work and external funding from grants continues to dwindle.
- As a result, all services have to be very creative to achieve their aims and the Nature Conservation Team and the teams who feed into this type of work are no exception.
- It is easy to think of the natural environment and biodiversity as something which has always existed and will always exist – this is not the case.
- If you look more closely at the areas which we assume are thriving habitats, you will see that this is no longer the case. Plant and animal life is disappearing at an alarming rate and areas we believe are thriving ecosystems are failing.
- Once these areas lose their important species they run the risk of losing their protected status. Once this goes, these areas can become available for different land uses including development
- There are a multitude of studies both in the UK and internationally which shows the benefit of the natural environment and its positive impact on health. This ranges from the quality of air to the way in which our mental wellbeing is improved when we are surrounded by nature.
- Future generations will not see some of these areas if there is not an immediate push for their renewal
- Not all areas of ecological importance are immediately obvious. Whilst areas like Gower and parks are integral to biodiversity, much of the plant and animal life relies on connectivity. This means that there needs to be green corridors or stepping stones of unspoilt land so that species can link and move to create a robust and resilient ecosystem. Isolated patches of land wall off nature from their complimentary environments and this seriously impacts the ability to survive. Gardens and green spaces in urban areas are often disregarded, unused or undervalued but this has to change

- Swansea is at the forefront of urban development. The City Deal will be a once in a generation opportunity to redesign our landscape and allow Swansea to be a leader in city regeneration. This Panel believes that rural development can be built in to this and that Swansea can be trailblazer for well-planned and cutting edge ecosystem renewal
- The green spaces currently planned can have the right plants to encourage the right species to create the right environment for nature to thrive
- It is everyone's responsibility to commit to this and to ensure that the future of Swansea is also the future of nature