



**Report of the Convener of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Inquiry  
To the Natural Environment Inquiry Scrutiny Panel – 4<sup>th</sup> October 2018**

**Findings and Emerging Themes**

<b>Purpose:</b>	The purpose of this report is to help the Panel to develop its conclusions and recommendations from the scrutiny inquiry into the Natural Environment.
<b>Content:</b>	This report provides a summary of the evidence from the review. The report also includes some emerging themes for discussion by the Panel, which have been drawn up based on the evidence.
<b>Councillors are being asked to:</b>	To consider these findings and discuss possible conclusions and recommendations.
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**1. Background**

- The Inquiry into the Natural Environment commenced on the 26<sup>th</sup> March 2018 and evidence has been gathered from a number of sources over the past 6 months. The Panel will now start the process of concluding their inquiry and agreeing recommendations that will be presented to Cabinet.

***Inquiry key question is: How can the Council, with its partners, develop and improve regional working for the benefit of Swansea and its residents?***

**2. Briefing/Main body of report**

- This report highlights some of the key themes arising from the evidence gathered by the Panel and forms the basis for writing the final report.
- The final report when written will answer the key question by using the findings from the inquiry to draw conclusions. The final report will provide recommendations to Cabinet based on evidence which has been provided throughout the inquiry.

### 3. Emerging Themes

1. Not having an environmental corporate priority is preventing it from being embedded in business and strategic plans
  - Draft currently submitted – awaiting outcome of acceptance as 6<sup>th</sup> corporate priority
  - The level of commitment seems to be dependent on the staff working under a specific service. Additionally, knowledge levels and priority of the topic differs across the Council
  - It is at odds with the WBFGA and the EA which call for a corporate level commitment to the issue. *'The S6 duty requires that public authorities must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity so far as consistent with the proper exercise of their functions and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems. To follow the S6 duty public authorities should embed the consideration of biodiversity and ecosystems into their early thinking and business planning, including any policies, plans, programmes and projects, as well as their day to day activities.'*
2. The profile of the Natural Environment and Biodiversity is not high enough across the Council
  - Some services may not recognise their role in relation to the natural environment
  - Not all services recognise the direct and indirect benefits that a thriving natural environment brings to them (health/financial/tourism etc)
3. Specialist and high quality work is being undertaken currently
  - There is a high level of preventative and day to day work including policy development which is currently being undertaken by Swansea Council
  - Staff are regarded highly amongst their peers for their knowledge and experience
4. From a prevention perspective, the financial benefits of undertaking work in relation to the Natural Environment and Biodiversity may not be fully realised
  - It has been suggested that preventative work now will ensure funds will be available going forward to focus on other corporate priorities
  - If there is an incident e.g. flooding the cost to fix it will outweigh any preventative cost (catastrophe cover?)
5. The Nature Conservation Team has an excellent professional reputation
  - External providers have commented on the level of expertise and passion the team have

6. Not enough awareness of current work

- There is a range of work being undertaken by the Nature Conservation Team which is not publicised enough
- The team have productive working relationships with a range of other providers and are well regarding in their area of work

7. Could be better external partnership working on a strategic scale

- There are a range of departments which link in with partners at various stages for various reasons but there is not enough strategic direction about the level of input and the financial benefits from joint working

8. There is commitment from voluntary groups based in the Councils green spaces making significant contributions

- From parks to Kilvey Hill and green spaces, the Council has an extremely committed and passionate group of volunteers
- The amount of work being undertaken by these volunteers is substantial
- A mapping exercise would establish the amount of land covered and could produce a financial cost of maintenance for the Council (if volunteers left)

9. Should be more cross departmental working with common objectives

- Whilst legislation obviously is the same across all services, the aims and priorities of the services are seen as conflicting – environmental/financial
- Volunteers have commented that when contacted different services they do not get a consistent response on the Councils approach to that issue

10. The recognition and desire to maintain green spaces is evident

- People who have engaged in the process so far have had very positive things to say about the green spaces in Swansea
- The positive impact on health and wellbeing has also been brought up

11. Success is limited due to lack of enforcement

- Enforcement of this type is not a statutory requirement
- There is concern that ecological mitigation and biodiversity requirements are not being followed through due to the lack of enforcement after the fact

12. Potential misinterpretation of 'Resilient Wales' goal in WBFGA

- Concerns that organisations are misinterpreting this
- 'Resilience' means ecological resilience not social or personal resilience

13. Policy conflicts – income and biodiversity

- There are potential conflicts between some Council policies
- Enhancing and maintaining biodiversity can be seen as a barrier

- There should be an embed of biodiversity in all planning and strategy from a top down level to ensure compliance with the relevant legislation

#### 14. Taking risks and new ways of working

- Public bodies are being encouraged to take risks when planning projects and look at new and radical ways of including biodiversity
- There are current projects in other areas doing this – project on River Taff
- Swansea has already undertaken work which looked at green solutions successfully – Marram grass to stabilise sand dunes

#### 15. Review of current agreements relating to land use

- Opportunity to review the agreements the Council currently has with users of its land to ensure that biodiversity is protected
- Community groups, land with grazing rights and any other relevant land
- This would ensure that there is an up to date clause referencing relevant legislation restricting actions which could put the Council in breach of relevant legislation

#### 16. Biodiversity and funding

- Currently, work relating to biodiversity is delivered under one team and funded from one team's budget
- Discuss options and ideas

### **4. Conclusions/Task**

- Taking into account all of the information provided in the evidence pack, the aim of this session is to create first stage recommendations
- These recommendations will be used to create the initial draft of the final report of the inquiry

**Appendices:** Evidence pack