



City and County of Swansea

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

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Monday, 29 June 2020 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor P Lloyd (Chair) Presided

Councillors

M C Child

P R Hood-Williams

L James

A H Stevens

Steering Group Members

J France

S Heard

S Hill

H Osborn

P Thornton

Officer(s)

Paul Meller

Strategic Planning and Natural Environment Manager

Chris Lindley

Gower AONB Team Leader

Mike Scott

Gower AONB Officer

Jeremy Parkhouse

Democratic Services Officer

Apologies for Absence

Councillors: J P Curtice

Steering Group Members: R Button, James Chambers, G Howe, P Jenkins, B Parry and D P Tucker

39 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.

40 Minutes.

Resolved that the Minutes of the Gower AONB Partnership Annual Meeting held on 2 December 2019 be approved as a correct record.

41 Gower AONB Management Plan - Update. (Chris Lindley)

Chris Lindley, Gower AONB Team Leader provided an update report regarding progress of the Gower AONB Management Plan.

Details of the progress of the Gower AONB Management Plan Sub-group and the review process and reviewed timetable were provided. It was added that after some delay due to COVID-19, the timetable outlined the process and outputs required to

get an adopted, reviewed management plan by March 2022 (5 years since the current one was adopted). The timeframe provided a broad idea of what was required, the main activities of the Sub-group and was required to factor in statutory / public consultation periods and Welsh translation of the draft and final Plans.

It was highlighted that Natural Resources Wales (NRW) had provided all Welsh AONB's with a series of environmental datasets / statistics specifically cut to the AONB boundary and published the South West Wales Area Statement. Both of these points would be beneficial to and influential upon the preparation of the management plan.

It was concluded that the AONB team would formally write to NRW to start the review process (which would have further detail on the timeline) and we would also commence the compilation of the State of the AONB report.

Resolved that the content of the report be noted.

42 Welsh Government Funding & National Landscapes Partnership. (Chris Lindley)

The Gower AONB Team Leader presented a report regarding Welsh Government Funding and the National Landscape Partnership (NLP).

Further to a report the Steering Group in December 2019, it was outlined that Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority had been selected to host the NLP team, although work to proceed with this had been suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Details regarding a capital investment fund of £4.75 million across Wales' eight Designated Landscapes called the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places Programme was outlined. Gower AONB was set to benefit £135,000 towards project delivery of the following capital projects:-

- Clyne Valley Country Park - Capital works and improvements to visitor facilities, access routes and heritage features.
- Purchase of battery-powered countryside management tools.
- Bishop's Wood Local Nature Reserve – sustainable drainage and access improvements.

The Steering Group discussed the following: -

- Access works to cater for additional visitors at Clyne Valley Country Park and the potential costs;
- Balancing the need to attract more visitors with the need to protect the landscape;
- The problems encountered between pedestrians and cyclists on the cycle track within the Country Park and the proposals being considered to improve matters.

Resolved that the contents of the report be noted.

43 Gower AONB Design Guide - Revision of Supplementary Planning Guidance. (Mike Scott)

Mike Scott, Gower AONB Officer presented a report which informed the Steering Group regarding the revision of Statutory Planning Guidance (SPG).

It was explained that following the adoption of the Local Development Plan (LDP) in February 2019, the Design Guide had been updated and extended by the Planning Policy Team, working with Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners. The revised edition would include new sections on:

- Chalets
- Lighting
- Advertising Signage

It was expected that a 6 week public consultation would start by October 2020, with adoption as SPG and publication by early 2021.

The adoption as SPG of the lighting guidance within the Design Guide would enable International Dark Skies to consider the application for Dark Sky Community status by the Authority.

Resolved that the contents of the report be noted.

44 Sustainable Development Fund - Financial Report. (Mike Scott)

The Gower AONB Officer presented the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) Panel Financial Summary report.

It was outlined that the SDF budget for 2019/20 of £55,000 was fully committed, with all funds paid out. A total of 13 projects were supported, with grants from £150 to £12,000. An Annual Report had been submitted to Welsh Government, and would be distributed to Steering Group members shortly for information.

Welsh Government had confirmed the SDF budget for 2020/21 as £100,000.

There were currently 7 projects approved with SDF funding for 2020/21, with 2 applications to be considered by the SDF Panel in July, and 2 further applications anticipated at present.

Further projects would be brought forward during 2020/21, to fully commit the funds.

The Committed Funds figure included the CCS Management Fee of £10,000 (10%).

Total Funds available	£ 100,000
Committed Funds	£ 43,170
Uncommitted Funds	£ 56,830
Applications under consideration by the panel	£ 21,500

It was added that the budget for 2021/22 had not been confirmed, but was anticipated to be £55,000.

Resolved that the contents of the report be noted.

45 Clyne Valley Country Park. (Chris Lindley)

The Gower AONB Team Leader presented a report which examined the approach by Swansea Council towards managing Clyne Valley Country Park.

It was explained that the current Swansea Local Development Plan (LDP) which had been adopted in February 2019, included a specific policy (TR4) for Clyne Valley Country Park. The LDP identified the boundary to the Country Park and formalised Council policy relating to its use. Clyne Valley was also specifically acknowledged in the LDP as representing a strategically important green space and a key element of the County's Green Infrastructure network.

However, beyond these LDP policies, the Council had no identified management objectives or departmental responsibility for the Country Park. In addition, there had not been a review of Clyne Valley, the Country Park, the Council's strategy or objectives for the area since the 1978 planning study, which occurred more than 40 years ago. Management decisions were therefore taken following separate departmental priorities and within budgetary constraints.

It was added that Management issues over recent months, including damage from third party activities during COVID-19 restrictions, had identified the need to improve the Council's overall approach to managing the Country Park. Progress had therefore been made with a view to developing a strategy for Members and senior management to develop a clear view on direction and responsibilities into the long term.

The Steering Group discussed the following: -

- Problems caused by mountain bikes and the responsibility of the Council towards the direct management of the Country Park;
- Protecting and enhancing the natural environment within the Park while also improving public access;
- The involvement of partner organisations, e.g. Natural Resources Wales in the management of the Country Park.

Resolved that the contents of the report be noted.

46 Parking on Cefn Bryn. (Steve Heard)

Steve Heard, Vice Chair of the Steering Group reported on a number of queries he had received from local residents with regards to the parking situation on Cefn Bryn.

He made reference to the changes that had been implemented at the top of Cefn Bryn, specifically the placement of boulders adjacent to the road, which prevented vehicular access onto the land. He added that while this had been a positive preventative measure, some visitors had chosen to either drive over the bunding at the side of the road or park on the verge and sought progress to identify a permanent solution.

The Steering Group discussed the following: -

- Proposals for a crescent shape of boulders surrounding the parking area, lengthening the bunding area and creating a clearway from Cilibion to Reynoldston;
- Ensuring that the bunding was effective and prevented vehicular access onto the land at the top of Cefn Bryn and at other points such as the old pumping station;
- Proposed solution being designed by Swansea Council Highways and the consultation process / decision process to finalise the solution;
- The need to prevent overnight camping, particularly by mobile homes which was causing severe erosion at the top of Cefn Bryn;
- Possible park and walk solutions;
- Addressing the severe erosion and potential alternative surface options;
- How the Council was very restricted in what it could do;
- Focussing upon this problem in order to find a workable and sustainable solution;
- The positive progress made in getting the different organisations involved around the table to discuss the problem.

It was explained that the Sub-Group which was formed to progress the issue, would only be able to progress matters once the costings for the proposed Swansea Council Highways solution had been received.

Resolved that the contents of the report be noted.

47 Gower Society Issues. (Gordon Howe)

A report was submitted on behalf of the Gower Society in respect of the following matters: -

- 1) Concerns and anomaly of permitted Development for 28 days to sell products in sensitive locations within the AONB and effects upon the landscape.

Resolved that the item be discussed at the next scheduled meeting.

- 2) Protection of sensitive woodlands, trees and hedgerows from indiscriminate felling at an earlier stage, prior to any potential damage

It was suggested that better and quicker collaboration between the managers of the AONB and other agencies such as NRW would improve matters and reference was made to recent examples such as Carters Ford Woodland, Fairy Hill Parkland, Long Acre Field and adjacent woodland in Caswell.

Discussions took place regarding: -

- Issues surrounding the removal of trees such as obtaining a felling licence;
- Situations where a felling licence was not required;
- Illegal / non-illegal removal of trees during nesting season ;
- Sanctions involved, particularly surrounding Tree Preservation Orders;
- Suggested examples listed which did / did not have licences;
- How quicker action would prevent trees being removed.

Resolved that the item be discussed at the next scheduled meeting.

- 3) The Council had received its first application in the AONB for a One Planet Earth enterprise that included two potential dwellings. Currently the Local Development Plan (LDP) could allow this but if it was approved where does it end? It was initially excluded in the final Draft LDP but was changed in the Final Approved version.

Resolved that the item be deferred as it was a live planning application.

48 COVID 19 Restrictions and Visitor Behaviour. (James Chambers and Roger Button)

A report was submitted on behalf of James Chambers and Roger Button regarding COVID 19 Restrictions and Visitor Behaviour.

It was highlighted that as lockdown unravelled, with holidays abroad complicated by quarantine measures and an absence of local controls, Gower was a playground for those who just wanted to get out. In recent weeks, Gower had been victim to significant littering to hedgerows and beaches, indiscriminate parking and public fowling, particularly where car parks were open but toilet facilities were closed. This was largely caused by people from outside of the area, in contravention of the pandemic travel restrictions, which had increased the risk of cross infection / contamination and reduced access for emergency responders to local communities.

Measures were sought which would help limit the potential damage and vandalism of the environment within in the AONB and improve the safety of its communities, while the pandemic was prevalent.

Discussions centred around the following: -

- How some public toilets had reopened, alleviating some of the issues raised;

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- The need for improved control and Policing to prevent similar situations to those that had occurred at Langland Bay;
- Use of enforcement when individuals stepped out of line;
- The difficulty in opening public toilets / preventing further spread of COVID 19;
- Addressing the large number of visitor numbers to specific sites in Gower during the period, some of whom had travelled long distances and the difficulty in policing their movements.

Resolved that the content of the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 3.15 pm

Chair