

Working with Nature



To improve health, enhance biodiversity and reduce our carbon footprint.

Lead – This work is coordinated by the Working with Nature Task Group and led by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Swansea Environmental Forum (SEF).

Partners / Stakeholders Involved

Natural Resources Wales (NRW)	Swansea Environmental Forum	Swansea Council
Swansea University	Swansea Local Nature Partnership	Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue
Swansea Bay University Health Board	Low Carbon Swansea Bay network	The Environment Centre
Swansea Community Green Spaces Project	Swansea Tree Forum	Welsh Government
Green Infrastructure Consultancy		

Overview of work within Working with Nature

The Working with Nature objective highlights the importance of the natural environment to health and well-being and sets out proposals for increasing green infrastructure and biodiversity, reducing our carbon footprint and improving our understanding of natural resources and sustainability.

Swansea's natural environment is one of outstanding quality and beauty. The diversity of landscapes, habitats and species it supports makes it one of the most attractive and ecologically rich counties in the UK.

A Working with Nature Task Group has been established with representatives of PSB members and other partners to develop and deliver an action plan for this objective.

The following sections outline progress that has been made related to action areas in the Working with Nature Action Plan.

Green Infrastructure



Green Infrastructure (GI) is a term used to describe all the features of the natural environment between and within our towns and cities.

Natural Resources Wales came together with Swansea Council realising that we needed to have a strategic approach to urban greening across the city centre.

Swansea residents and businesses have helped draft a key plan to help deliver a greener city.

Their ideas and thoughts, gathered through public consultation this year have been woven into Regenerating our City for Wellbeing and Wildlife, a draft Swansea city centre green infrastructure strategy. The overwhelming message from our public engagement was that city nature is important to people; it increases their enjoyment and the time they spend in the city centre.

The draft strategy developed by Swansea Council, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the Green Infrastructure Consultancy was presented to the council's cabinet on October 17. It promotes a joined-up approach to incorporating green infrastructure in future city centre regeneration work. The strategy explores the benefits and cost-effectiveness of green infrastructure in terms of flood-risk reduction, cleaner air and water, reductions in noise, gains in biodiversity and reduced CO2 emissions. This strategy also sets out a vision for central Swansea to be much greener, creating green spaces and using a combination of street-level features like street trees and rain gardens as well as vegetation on buildings, including green roofs and green walls. Green cover in the city is currently estimated at 13 per cent but the aim is to increase this to 26 per cent by 2030. It aims to help deliver:

- a greener city, with fewer hard surfaces, to help create a city centre that is a more attractive place in which to live and more resilient to climate change;
- inclusion of more nature to provide spaces for wildlife, bring people pleasure and offer an improved experience for visitors and traders.
- a more economically prosperous hub for the region in years to come by encouraging strategically planned green infrastructure enhancements in new and existing developments.

It will help developers improve the city centre by bringing nature into their developments. This will create spaces people want to visit and improve wellbeing, the economy and the environment.

The head of South Wales operations for NRW said "We're excited that this strategy has benefitted from not just the ideas and advice of specialists but that the local community has had a chance to have their say on the kind of green city they want to see. Green infrastructure provides an opportunity for Swansea to bring nature into the heart of the city and widen its appeal to residents and visitors alike. This will bring multiple benefits, such as boosting biodiversity and improving climate change

resilience. This project will give us the opportunity to create a vibrant city that improves the wellbeing of residents and visitors, whilst making a home for wildlife. We're thrilled to be a part of this project and look forward to working with our partners to bring these ideas to life”.

Other major projects are planned and the new strategy will guide developers on how nature can be integrated into their designs.

The Green Infrastructure Strategy will complement the council's Swansea Central Area Regeneration Framework (SCARF), the Welsh Government's Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

Green Infrastructure Achievements

- GI Stakeholder Engagement events have included workshops for private, public and 3rd sectors. Targeted sessions with key Council departments, existing partnerships and Council Members. **630+ face to face** conversations with the public.
- Developers already engaging in the pre-publication GI Strategy – to factor into future plans, and using the ‘Green Space Factor Tool’.
- Work on publishing the ‘Swansea Central Area Green Infrastructure Strategy’ is moving forward at a pace with a story featured in BBC news <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-50303472>
- GI being progressed as part of the Regeneration Investment Grant funding (e.g. green wall/roofs) – Morriston Post Office likely to be first example of adoption of green roof. A green wall is to be part of Arena car-park.
- Work has been undertaken with Pobl and Coastal social housing groups, driving wider staff engagement, embedding the principles of GI, offering support and providing links to a network of GI specialist advice. Coastal are developing a green roof at their city centre Head Office and Pobl have GI as key theme in their regeneration master planning for their housing stock.
- Business Improvement District seeing GI as means to enhance visitor and trader experience. Other proposals on the horizon, including installing biodiverse green roof bin shelters.
- The Welsh Government funded *Connecting Green Infrastructure – South West* project has also provided support for a number of Green Infrastructure projects including habitat management and access improvements at Local Nature Reserves and wildlife sites.

Green Infrastructure stakeholders / partners involved – Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Swansea Council, Green Infrastructure Strategy Project Group, Green Infrastructure Consultancy.

Urban Tree Planting

There has been a surge in tree planting schemes across Swansea organised by various organisations and communities. Whilst this is welcomed, the Working with Nature Task Group is keen to ensure that appropriate trees are planted in appropriate locations. The newly established Swansea Tree Forum is playing a key role in this and

facilitating collaboration between community groups, voluntary sector organisations and public bodies.

The first phase of identifying suitable sites for tree planting on Swansea Council land has been carried out and Glastir funding has been secured for four sites to be planted.

Almost 150 trees have been planted alongside streets in Swansea's Penlan area and 250 will follow next year. The new trees will soften the look of the area and will greatly benefit the local biodiversity. The semi-mature trees represent a wide variety of native and ornamental species. They have been chosen to be suitable for the residential area where they will stand. Local residents can enjoy the new additions for generations to come.



Swansea Council, Swansea Tree Forum and The Woodland Trust are working together on a plan to boost the city's biodiversity.

Young people helped to replant trees in a Swansea community after a spate of vandalism resulted in newly planted trees being ripped up. It sends out a positive message to other young people in the city that they can contribute to a greener, improved community environment.



Steps have been taken to tackle Ash trees affected by Ash Dieback. The fungal disease - which was first detected in the UK in 2012. The disease prevents Ash trees absorbing water so they become brittle. This means larger mature trees could collapse without warning and we need to ensure this does not happen. By us all acting now, we will reduce the risk that diseased trees will fall on people, property, power lines and roads. So far, around 3,000 Ash trees have been surveyed on public land many of which show varying signs of Ash Dieback.

Swansea Tree Forum and Swansea Environmental Forum held discussions and a consultation workshop with The Orchard Project, a London-based national charity, about expanding their work into Swansea. Funding has now been secured and two p/t project officers will be based in The Environment Centre from spring 2020.

Urban Tree Planting stakeholders/ partners involved- Swansea Council, Natural Resources Wales, SBUHB, Coed Cymru, Swansea Tree Forum, Woodland Trust, Swansea Environmental Forum.

Green Spaces

High-quality parks and green spaces are important to our communities, our health and wellbeing, nature and the economy. We want to encourage everyone to explore their local areas and make the most of what we have on our doorstep.

- The Councils Nature Conservation Team with funding from NRW delivered a project (Our Nature, Our Future”) which encouraged 20 local primary schools to connect with and make better use of their local wildlife sites and enabled plans to be prepared for each school to improve their grounds for biodiversity.

The Swansea Community Green Spaces Project, a partnership initiative managed by Swansea Environmental Forum, supports citizens and communities to have a greater involvement in the management and use of local green spaces. Over the past year, the project has supported many new and existing initiatives on sites across the city and county.

One key achievement was the establishment of a community growing project in Clydach, sited between the community centre and doctor’s surgery, which has become an award-winning community hub providing social and mental health benefits to vulnerable people and supplying provisions to the local food bank.

The Swansea Community Green Spaces Project has also contributed to and supported local tree planting initiatives and worked closely with the Swansea Tree Forum and the Swansea Community Growing Network to encourage collaboration and networking.

Green Spaces stakeholders/ partners involved- Swansea Environmental Forum, Swansea Council (Nature Conservation Team), Natural Resources Wales, Swansea Community Green Spaces Project, The Environment Centre, Swansea Community Growing Network, Swansea Council for Voluntary Service.

Ecosystem Services / Nature Recovery

Less progress was made in these particular aspects of the WWN action plan during 2019/20 as the focus and energy was directed to other areas – though it is also recognised that the work undertaken with green infrastructure, urban tree planting and green spaces all contribute to better understanding and use of ecosystem services and can make significant influence on nature recovery.

There will be a greater focus on this section of the action plan in the coming year as Swansea Council is recruiting a biodiversity officer who will support the Swansea Local Nature Partnership to develop a Local Nature Recovery Plan and WWN partners will explore ways to support and promote pollinator projects.

Nature Recovery stakeholders/ partners involved- Swansea Local Nature Partnership, Swansea Council, Natural Resources Wales, Swansea University

Carbon Reduction

Swansea Council declared a 'Climate Emergency' in July 2019 and has taken a number of steps in response to this, including drafting a Climate Change Charter to outline its commitment and encourage partners to sign-up; developing an action plan to address climate-related issues across all its functions and services; and develop a programme of stakeholder engagement, with support from Swansea Environmental Forum.

Swansea Environmental Forum also agreed that its focus will be on supporting partners and communities to take action on climate and nature recovery. Discussions are ongoing between Swansea Council, Swansea Environmental Forum, VocalEyes and other partners about how best to engage communities and stakeholders in the climate agenda.

Extensive discussions have taken place between the One Planet Centre, SEF, Swansea Council and other partners about approaches to measuring the impact of actions to tackle the climate and nature emergencies. A pilot scheme with the Swansea RDP has been undertaken to reshape how the funding programme supports social enterprises, the countryside and communities in rural areas using 'One Planet' principles.

The WWW Task Group have also been liaising with PSB working groups in west Wales about the work they are doing related to climate risk management and adaptation.

Low Carbon Swansea Bay (LCSB) continues to be a key network for encouraging and supporting organisations across the region to reduce their energy use and carbon footprint through knowledge sharing and collaboration.

In July 2019, LCSB members came together to share information and discuss the topic of *Greener Homes* with presentations from the Down to Earth Project (who hosted the event at their amazing Bryn Gwyn site), Coastal Housing, Swansea Council, Cardiff University, Pobl and Sero homes. This was followed up in November with a site visit to the Active Homes development in Neath. Further site visit to Swansea Council's retrofit project in Craig Cefn Parc was arranged for March 2020 but had to be postponed due to the coronavirus crisis.

In September 2019, LCSB collaborated with 4theRegion and the Flexis programme to put on a regional event focused on *Renewable Energy* which included several project updates related to renewables, energy, carbon reduction and climate change, followed by table discussions on the step changes needed for greater use of renewables and carbon reduction.

The Swansea Bay EV Group became more active again in 2019 with well attended and lively meetings in May (hosted at Swansea Guildhall), July (Riversimple, Llandrindod Wells), October (Craig-y-Nos Country Park) and January 2020 (DVLA). The group changed its name to Swansea Bay ULEV (Ultra Low Emission Vehicles) Task Group to reflect its wider scope beyond just electric vehicles. The Swansea Bay

Sustainable Travel Planning Group also met on several occasions- bringing together partners to share information, ideas and encouragement towards more sustainable travel practices for staff, students, clients and customers.

LCSB held an event on *Travel and Transport* in January which featured a presentation from Tom Porter of Public Health Wales on the Healthy Travel Charter model developed for Cardiff. LCSB and partners are looking to work with PHW on a similar approach in Swansea and/or the south-west region. Transport and travel has also been proposed as a key focus in 2020 for Swansea Environmental Forum and its partners as part of their climate action programme.

Carbon Reduction- Stakeholders / partners involved- Swansea Environmental Forum, Swansea Council, Low Carbon Swansea Bay network.

Knowledge and Understanding

The WWN Task Group recognises the importance of increasing awareness and understanding of environmental challenges such as the decline in biodiversity and climate change, and sharing information about the opportunities and resources available to organisations, communities and individuals to help them address these issues, such as access to expertise, training, toolkits and funding sources that can support practical action.

In 2019, Swansea Environmental Forum and The Environment Centre collaborated to organise a programme of events, with funding from Natural Resources Wales and support from many WWN partners. These included a series of well attended evening public talks and discussions on several issues linked to the WWN agenda:

- *One Planet Swansea* approach in May with David Thorpe, One Planet Centre.
- *Active Travel and Climate Change* in June organised with Wheelrights cycle campaigning group and featuring Lee Waters AM.
- *Zero Waste Swansea* featuring updates from Swansea Council's Head of Waste management and several community recycling, repair and waste projects.
- *Regenerating Our City for Wellbeing and Wildlife* as part of the SEF AGM in November, with an update from Swansea Council and Natural Resource Wales officers on the new Green Infrastructure Strategy for Swansea Central.

The largest event was a day-long conference in May 2019 involving over 60 representatives from a wide range of partner organisations and individuals. The *SMART NATURE: Working with Nature in Swansea* conference focused on themes from the WWN Action Plan and included keynote presentations from Paul Allen of Zero Carbon Britain initiative and the Green Infrastructure Consultancy team. There were facilitated workshop discussions on key issues and on the other Swansea Wellbeing objectives. Feedback from the event was very positive and a large number of ideas were collected from the workshop sessions.

A second programme of evening public talks started in February 2020 with a session on *Fairtrade and the Climate Emergency* organised in collaboration with Swansea Fairtrade Forum to launch Fairtrade Fortnight and featuring a presentation by the CEO of Traidcraft. Further events were postponed due to the pandemic.

In early 2020, Swansea Environmental Forum also collaborated with VocalEyes and others to initiate a project to design a new easy-to-use online resource which will promote proven, adaptable and replicable solutions for climate action and nature recovery. This will initially involve contracting researchers to gather information on best practice projects and policies, and supporting resources, and compiling as project templates. A further phase of the initiative will involve engaging communities, and other beneficiaries through community organisers and networks to ensure use and development of the resource.

Knowledge and Understanding – Stakeholders / partners involved – Swansea Environmental Forum, The Environment Centre, Swansea Council, Swansea University, Low Carbon Swansea Bay network, VocalEyes, Natural Resources Wales.

Challenges/ Barriers

- Insufficient communication from the PSB to the Working with Nature group.

Future Work

The Working with Nature Task Group will review the outputs from the Smart Nature conference, share progress on the action plan and agree priorities for 2020/21, with a particular focus on responding to the Covid19 crisis.

Key actions and priorities for the coming year will include:

- Continue Green Infrastructure strategy work- consultation and training. A Green Infrastructure skills and knowledge development event is planned for later this year.
- Widespread community engagement has already taken place and included pop-up sessions in the city centre and activity on social media but we need to continue this work and any future feedback gathered can be used to make sure this is a useful tool for enhancing the green infrastructure we will see in future development.
- Continue with Ecosystem services mapping
- Review approaches to urban tree planting.
- Support Swansea Council to develop a Green Fairness Policy, which could be replicated by partner organisations.
- Ensure ongoing work takes stock of Area Statement for South West Wales.
- Develop the Working with Nature action plan to take account of the Climate and Nature Emergency declarations and the opportunities for a ‘green recovery’ from the Covid19 crisis, including addressing travel and transport issues as a key focus for 2020/21.