



Report of the Gower AONB Officer

Gower AONB Partnership Steering Group – 5 July 2021

Informal Camping and Overnight Parking

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Like many parts of the UK, Gower has seen continuing growth in visitor number over the past few years – and this has been increased by the effects of COVID 19 restrictions on overseas travel during 2020, and 2021.

Many places on Gower have issues with two particular types – camping and overnight parking by motorhomes or campervans. In most cases, it is not so much the presence of those involved, it is usually the associated anti-social behaviour (noise, environmental damage, litter, etc.). Sometimes it happens because visitors cannot find official camping sites – more often it is a deliberate choice.

The legal situation can be complex, and differs between locations and types.

Frequently used terminology:

- Wild Camping – traditionally this type of camping is lightweight, done in small numbers and only for two or three nights in any one place, usually as part of a walking or cycling trip. Technically a civil offence rather than a legal one, it has sometimes been tolerated by landowners, usually being discrete and leaving no trace.
- Informal or Freedom Camping – widely adopted terms for overnight parking or camping on the roadside, either in vehicles or tents. On the highway, this is legal, but on private land, it may be a civil offence.
- Dirty Camping - where people commit other offences such as littering, causing environmental damage (e.g. driving on sensitive vegetation or cutting trees for fires) or cause disturbance or nuisance to others. This may be a civil offence, but is more likely to be a criminal one.

The main issue is how these different situations are dealt with – as civil offences, the responsibility rests with the landowner. The addition of anti-social behaviour would attract the possible involvement of the Police – but it is often a low priority. They all frequently take a good deal of time to resolve, usually at weekends or in the evenings, by their nature.

Previously the AONB Ranger and local Police mounted regular joint patrols to “hot spots” – however, neither organisation have the resources to do this at present.

The AONB Team, working with partners, recently dealt with informal camping on Cefn Bryn by limiting vehicle access. The same approach may have to be taken elsewhere. The measures taken to address the issues are rarely simple, quick or cheap – it is often simply moved to another site. They also impact on other users.

The cumulative effect of informal camping (and particularly dirty camping) can be huge on local communities – experiencing repeated anti-social behaviour and damage / littering. It is often beyond individual landowners capacity to address the issues, and is best tackled on a partnership approach.

Mike Scott,
25th June 2021