



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Scrutiny Performance Panel - Natural Environment**

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Thursday, 26 August 2021 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor P K Jones (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)
E W Fitzgerald
M H Jones
B J Rowlands

Councillor(s)
S J Gallagher
H Lawson
W G Thomas

Councillor(s)
O G James
H M Morris

Other Attendees

Mark Thomas	Cabinet Member – Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management
Emily Davies	Scrutiny Officer
Jeremy Davies	Group Leader Parks and Cleansing
Chris Howell	Head of Waste, Parks and Cleansing
Deborah Hill	Nature Conservation Team Leader

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): J A Hale, I E Mann, C Richards, M Sherwood and L J Tyler-Lloyd

52 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.

53 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips

In accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, no declarations of Whipped Votes or Party Whips were declared.

54 Minutes of Previous Meeting(s)

The minutes of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel meeting, held on 29 June 2021, were agreed as an accurate record.

55 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

56 Ash Dieback

The Panel received an update from Cllr Mark Thomas, Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management and Jeremy Davies, Group Leader Parks and Cleansing.

Discussion focussed on:

- Context and outline of Ash Dieback disease. The disease affects Ash trees by blocking the water transport systems. If they are not dealt with, trees are at risk of collapsing, presenting an immediate danger to the surrounding area.
- Wider regional and UK issues. This is a significant, complex and expensive problem. Europe-wide problem and 90% of Ash trees are expected to be effected.
- Cabinet and Councillors received briefings in May 2019, the council website now has an FAQ section.
- Considered and recorded as a corporate risk - this has a significant impact on the environment, but also significant financial impacts to bear, surveying all trees on all council land.
- The Parks Department Tree Services Unit has prioritised category 3 and 4 trees in its highest level of response. This does affect the capacity to carry out less urgent and some income related arboriculture works.
- Difficulty in tackling category 3 and 4 trees as logistically challenging and time consuming.
- Public highways, parks and cemeteries have been prioritised in terms of removal of dangerous trees.
- The wood from felled trees that is in a re-usable condition is recovered for the Waste Wood Re-Use Project and utilised to manufacture products, such as benches, which are then installed in Swansea's parks.
- Replacement of felled trees remains a challenge. In some cases, the replanting of trees may not be necessary, allowing nature to take over naturally.
- Direct financial costs in the region of £150,000 per year. Indirect cost to other works being unavoidably side-lined.
- Contractors are used to fell when large numbers of trees occupy a single location and generally adjacent to the highway.
- Funding has been secured from Welsh Government to purchase machinery and equipment.
- Members queried the replanting strategies being used and what trees are to replace the felled Ash. Officers explained that any new Ash trees are likely to be affected by the disease, whatever their age.
- Early indicators show 5-10% of trees may have a genetic resistance. Annual surveys completed to confirm condition of trees.
- Single Ash trees felled are not necessarily replanted at the location felled, but nature is allowed to replace the areas naturally with flora and fauna.
- Wider Green Infrastructure strategy – trees planted are of native and mixed species, to ensure any new diseases will not affect all.
- Biodiversity – a number of species are wholly dependent on Ash. Localised guidance available to deal with this. Circa 50 species of trees to provide hosts for lichen dependant on Ash.

- Regarding regeneration of saplings, they will be same genetic stock, although will provide an immediate habitat for some species. Leaving stumps may also provide habitat for lichen.
- Invasive species of sycamore may take over if not managed.
- Members queried what the Council has done to ensure awareness of this topic amongst private landowners. Officers explained that extensive communication and publication had been undertaken.
- Members queried the extent of research being done into genetic resistance. Officers are involved in wider projects to provide samples for wider research across the UK. National research projects are ongoing.
- Members raised queries of signage and permanent information boards in areas where a larger percentage of woodland is affected. Officers explained that signage is provided before and during felling, also leaving bio-degradable signs following completion of larger scale work. Permanent signs were suggested.
- Officers undertook to better inform members of planned felling in wards.
- Members suggested a programme of tree sponsorship, allowing members of the public to engage with replanting.

The Panel considered the information provided, asked questions, and gave views on the way forward. The Chair thanked all for their input.

AGREED that the Panel write to the Cabinet Members with its views and recommendations.

57 Work Plan 2021-22

58 Letters

The Panel received the correspondence sent following the meeting of the Panel held on 29 June 2021.

The meeting ended at 2.55 pm