

(By Email)

Please ask for: Councillor Andrew Stevens
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Our Ref: AS/WN
Your Ref:
Date: 3rd January 2024

Dear Cllr. Mike White

RE: Scrutiny Letter to Cabinet Member for Environment and Infrastructure dated 7 Dec (22 Nov - Public Rights of Way)

Thank you for your letter on the 7th of December regarding the Scrutiny Working Group on 22 November – discussion on Public Rights of Way.

We want to express our praise for the Countryside Access Team who provide an excellent service with limited resources.

Thank you, I note and agree with your comment.

2. We request that the Cabinet Member lobby the Welsh Local Government Association to introduce legislation in Wales regarding duplication of diversion orders. This legislation has been introduced in England for several years and there are clear resource and cost savings to be made by making this change.

I note and agree with your comment. I will write to Welsh Local Government Association and Welsh Government to request that the legislation in Wales is introduced that will reduce costs and staff time in making diversion and creation orders.

3. We would like to see more detailed budget expenditure for the years provided in the report which were 2016-2023. For instance, in 2023 we were given figures of £98596 for grants, £250800 for salaries, material, plant etc and £45300 on maintenance. Could this and previous years be expanded to give a breakdown of spend for each of these figures. A table showing the PROW budget between 2016/17 and 2023/24 is attached. The grant expenditure in every year will be the same as the grant income because we can only claim for works that have been completed. Each year the target is to spend as close as possible to the amount of grant that we have been allocated, and this is mostly achieved.

For example, in 20/21 £58,800 was spent on Coastal Access works, £49,700 on Access Improvement works, and £21,400 on AONB access works, totaling £127,900, which is the same as the amount of grant money that was claimed.

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The Council's own maintenance budget has been £45,300 for the last 5 years. Some of this is used to match fund the Coast Path grant for works on the Coast Path (25%), and most of the remainder is used to cut back overgrowth on the paths.

4. We understand that the Active Travel network is separate from the PROW map and there are statutory implications, however there may be more opportunities for a joined-up approach

as currently Active Travel is maintained by highways and PROW by the Countryside Access Team. Integrating the routes and maintaining an overview of both would provide a clearer picture and a collaborative approach.

The purpose of Active Travel is to encourage people to make journeys on foot or by bicycle, rather than by car, resulting in healthier lifestyles and reducing CO² emissions. This means that most of the Active Travel routes that have been built or are to be built are in the urban areas or connect urban areas. Almost all public paths are found in the countryside and, in modern times, are used by people as a means to enjoy the countryside, with benefits for their health and well-being, and for tourism.

Therefore, whilst the purposes of both are different, there is some crossover, and it would be useful for the public to know how both networks connect together. Whilst, the public path network has, officially, been in existence for over 70 years, Active Travel is still in its infancy, and over time the two networks will become increasingly interconnected.

Obviously, there is already a map showing the public paths available on the public Council website, as well as being shown on all Ordnance Survey maps. It would, therefore, be useful if a compatible map was also available to the public showing the Active Travel routes.

In terms of working together, when a route is to be developed for Active Travel, the Countryside Access Team are made aware of this and where there is a common interest, we can work together to provide the best access for the public. A good example is the proposed Active Travel route across Clyne common, which will intersect 3 bridlepaths and a footpath as well as crossing through access land. If constructed the new Active Travel route will connect all of the existing paths together and improve access around the common for everyone.

5. We encourage partnership working where possible including the National Trust and the Active Travel Teams to maximize the opportunities to share resources. As described above, the Countryside Access Team works closely with the active travel team when there is mutual interest. The Countryside Access Team has always worked closely with the National Trust, as the Team and the Trust have a similar remit. The Team also works closely with other organizations such as Natural Resources Wales and the Ramblers.

6. We wish to encourage Councilors with routes in their ward to promote these locally through Community social media, local groups, and publications.
I note the comment.

7. We recommend continued development of local marketing and to include the bus station, railway station and other high footfall locations for advertising.

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- The Tourism Team work closely with GWR, who have been long-standing Visit Swansea Bay Partners and currently hold a Platinum Partner Package with us. This top package includes highest boosted listings, website banners, homepage features, blogs and social media posts amongst other benefits.
- The Tourism Team also post regular updates free bus services on their blogs, social media and industry newsletters.
- There are Visit Swansea Bay branded literature stands positioned at Swansea Railway Stations (amongst other locations in the city centre) directing visitors to www.visitswanseabay.com

In 2015, using Welsh Government funding, a large mural was installed in the coach arrival area of Swansea Bus Station (see below) welcoming visitors and directing them to www.visitswanseabay.com



- The Tourism Team sits on the Southwest Wales Connect Rail Partnership (part of 4TheRegion), which aims to promote sustainable transport across the region. Key members of the forum include Transport for Wales and GWR. The Tourism Team have been asked to contribute to their 'Southwest Wales Without a Car' project, which consist of producing a printed guidebook and a range of digital content by March 2024. The guidebook will feature a wide variety of destinations, things to do, events, days out, places to visit and accommodation options - all of which are accessible without a car, by rail, bus, bicycle and on foot.

8. Collaborative working between the Countryside Access Team and the tourism department to promote active holidays and incorporate rights of way in tourism promotion. The Countryside Access Team has produced a number of promoted walking routes, including a very popular leaflet on the Coast Path. These promoted routes, together with routes promoted by other organizations such as the National Trust, are supported by the Tourism Team and all the promoted routes produced by the Countryside Access Team can be found on the Visit Swansea Bay website. The Tourism Team are fully aware of the importance that access to the countryside has on the numbers of visitors to Swansea and Gower. The 2022 Visitor Survey carried out 1,000 face-to-face interviews with visitors at 7 locations across Swansea, Mumbles and Gower.

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- As was the case in previous surveys, the coast/beaches and scenery/landscape were the key motivations for visiting Swansea Bay.
- Other key influences included previous experience, **walking**, visiting family/friends and the countryside.
- The proportion of visitors citing the countryside as a motivation to visit Swansea Bay **has doubled** since 2015 (from 5% to 10%).

9. Consider apprenticeship schemes to help with outdoor work and shadowing officers. This will help with current workload and create future trained staff in this area.

Apprenticeship schemes require the employer to pay the salary of the apprentice with Welsh Government paying for training. Therefore, we would have to find additional funding to recruit an apprentice. In addition, it is unlikely that there are any local training providers that

could supply the necessary training because it is very specialized with only a small number of people dealing with public rights of way across Wales.

10. Resources are clearly a concern with a demonstrated reduction in staff support over the last few years. The financial investment is minor compared to some new developments yet the return on having these rights of way in Swansea is huge. We feel if footfall and usage increases this may demonstrate the need for increased budgets.

I note your comment. Future investment will of course depend on the Council's medium term financial planning, budget settlements and grant awards.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Andrew Stevens
Aelod Cabinet dros yr Amgylchedd ac Isadeiledd
Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure