

Climate Change and Nature Scrutiny Performance Panel Update

1. Remit of the Panel

The Panel is responsible for ongoing monitoring of performance in relation to climate change and the natural environment. The Panel will monitor delivery of the Council's work, commitments and implementation of agreed plans, and assess progress.

2. Key Activities

The Panel is currently meeting every two months and since the beginning of this municipal year the Panel has looked at the following:

Meeting	Topic(s)
4 July 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointment of Convener • Draft Work Plan 2023-24
3 October 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water Quality, Management and Pollution Control • Planning Enforcement: Nature and Biodiversity (Discussion on how to encourage people to look at biodiversity within planning applications)
28 November 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Tourism Briefing
30 January 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Electric Vehicle Charging Provision

3. Achievements / Impact

We have sent 2 letters (up to end December 2023) to relevant Cabinet Member(s) since our first meeting of the municipal year in July 2023, in order to give our views, raise concerns and make recommendations, for example:

Positives:

- Water Quality, Management and Pollution Control – Panel queried what interaction there is between Welsh Water, the Council and NRW regarding sewerage discharges and how Swansea is performing compared to other parts of the UK. Panel was informed that there is a lot of interaction, NRW liaises with Welsh Water over the number and duration of spills from sewer overflows, with the aim of reducing them, and where there are problems NRW will take action. Panel heard Swansea Bay itself has improved but NRW is still dealing with issues, for example in the Tawe, and is asking Welsh Water if they should prioritise some of their assets for more work under the asset management programme. Panel also heard that on the Gower coast, where the majority of bathing waters are, there are not many potential spillers and NRW is working with Welsh Water on some of these. Panel noted it is not as

good as NRW want it to be, but this area does not have the same level of problems as some areas in the UK.

- Environmental Tourism - Panel stated that Swansea is not registered on the Dark Skies website and heard the Council does not have Dark Skies status yet but is working towards it and by improving the offer, supporting businesses and promoting it, the Council is showing its commitment to trying to achieve it.
- Environmental Tourism - Panel noted from the report, there are areas cycle paths cannot go through due to legal issues as there is opposition from certain groups. Panel queried if there are rights of way going through these areas for people to walk etc, and if so, can these rights of way be promoted more to encourage more walkers/cyclists to use them. Panel also asked if cycle racks can be located in these places. Panel was informed there are public rights of way recorded across the whole of the county and these are promoted by means of the website: www.visitswanseabay – all the promoted walks in the county are advertised on there, and the majority are also available as downloadable PDF's. Also, at the entrance to the Civic Centre there is a display of walking leaflets produced by the Countryside Access team and partners. Panel heard the definitive map is on Swansea council's website and this has all the legally recorded public rights of way within the county available for people to utilise. Panel noted that legally, cyclists do not have the right to use public footpaths, whereas they are entitled to use public bridleways. However, when considering surfacing for public bridleways, the type of surface suitable for equestrians, is not always compatible for cyclists undergoing active travel journeys.

Issues / Concerns:

- Water Quality, Management and Pollution Control - Panel discussed how new suburban housing developments damage wildlife habitats and can also create pollution and asked what measures should be taken by the Council to ensure surface water drainage solutions do not pollute existing local environmental amenities such as ponds and water courses. Panel heard that from NRW perspective there are two sides to this. Firstly, it is important to have a sustainable strategy for dealing with surface water on any site and that is why there is Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) legislation and NRW would urge developers, and as far as possible the Council to encourage developers, to include this in their plans. Secondly, the construction phase, which the Panel heard NRW is particularly concerned about. Panel was informed many of the large construction projects in Swansea put a lot of pressure on local water courses during the construction phase. Silty water leaving site in an uncontrolled manner causes repeated small pollutions. Panel heard NRW feels the Council could, in the planning process, make sure pollution prevention provisions in the construction environmental management plan are as good as can be and it is something NRW would like improvement from the industry on.
- Environmental Tourism - Panel feels there are not enough public facilities available, for example, toilets, drinking water taps, cycle racks etc along the more tourist areas of Swansea and the Gower, including the sea front, and queried if there are plans to increase these types of facilities. Panel was informed there are public toilets close to all major beaches between Mumbles and Rhossili and that over the past 3 years, significant investment has been

made in physical refurbishments and improvements to the cleaning regimes. Panel heard there has been no funding available to provide new public toilets but was pleased to hear that grant funding from the WG has been secured to install two new Changing Places specialist toilets facilities, in Knab Rock and Rhossili. Panel also heard the Council is investigating options for increasing cycle parking facilities at strategic locations across the active travel network, funded by Welsh Government's Active Travel Fund. Panel noted that although not primarily targeted at tourist areas, the placement of these facilities may capture visitors who engage in recreational cycling.

- Environmental Tourism – Panel asked if the Council anticipates recent changes to bus services will have a big effect on green tourism, and if there are any plans to try and overcome this. Panel heard bus services on Gower are covered by Adventure Travel (not First Cymru) so are not affected by these changes. Most tourist routes in Swansea are still operating Monday to Sunday but the frequency of service has reduced, which is a challenge. Panel noted that one of the issues with bus services in Swansea has two providers – Adventure Travel and First Cymru and they do not operate a through ticket system. Panel was informed that research in 2022 showed the majority of people are still arriving by car. The Council is trying to encourage people to use public transport and rail is an option into the destination, but the ongoing rail dispute is discouraging people using this option and is more likely to have had an impact on visitors. On a positive note, Panel heard people are wanting to walk and cycle when they get here, and businesses are looking to invest in facilities which will hopefully attract more visitors in a more sustainable way.

Action Recommended / Agreed:

- Planning Enforcement: Nature and Biodiversity - Panel discussed how it is a reactive service as there is no legislative requirement for developers to notify Planning when starting a development, and the Council does not have enough resources to proactively monitor every development. Panel heard however that there are powers available if the Council is aware of a breach. Cabinet Member emphasized that the public have a very important role to play in reporting issues, therefore public awareness raising is essential going forward. Panel felt it would be useful to get something out on the Council's social media pages giving contact details for reporting issues, and Cabinet Member gave a commitment to liaise with the Communications Team to see what they can do proactively to communicate this message.
- Environmental Tourism - Panel discussed the cycle map of the area, and how previously in Scrutiny, members talked about a 'ski-style' map with red, blue, black and green lines showing the difficulty. Panel queried if this has been implemented in the map and how this is going to link up with rural Gower. Officers confirmed they will consider this suggestion and investigate its feasibility and how it aligns with the principles of the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013.

4. Future Work Programme

The programme for the remainder of this municipal year is as follows:

Meeting	Item to be discussed
19 March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Flood Risk Management – Annual Update (including discussion on Drainage Systems/Services) • Air Quality Management
14 May 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate Change Update (update on battery disposal to be included) • Achievement against Corporate Priorities / Objectives / Policy Commitments • Nature and Biodiversity Update (including Monitoring Delivery of Corporate Priority/Objective – Maintain & Enhance Nature & Biodiversity in Swansea) • Panel Review of the Year 2023/24

5. Action for the Scrutiny Programme Committee

None.