

Councillor Peter Jones
Convener – Natural Environment Scrutiny
Performance Panel

BY EMAIL

Please ask for: Councillor Mark Thomas
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Our Ref: MT/KH
Your Ref:
Date: 28 February 2020

Dear Councillor Jones

Thank you for your letter dated 7 February 2020 please find the responses to the issues you raised below.

Weed Management

- a) Until affordable and effective alternatives can be found glyphosate products should be used as sparingly as possible and away from high public footfall areas**

I agree that Glyphosate based herbicides (GBHs) should be used as sparingly as possible in all areas. The equipment used by Highways contractors supports this approach and the Parks department have significantly altered their practices to reduce usage.

- b) The Council should undertake public awareness / education around health and biodiversity (including the effect of glyphosate on pollinators) and public consultation on the issue of weed spraying e.g. view on the Council changing approaches to weed management, stopping or reducing weed treatment and view on alternatives etc. Introducing this topic at established consultation events such as the Big Conversation would also be useful to gauge the response of children and young people**

There is publicly available information available on the Council website (<https://www.swansea.gov.uk/herbicides>) relating to GBHs which also refers to European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), Health & Safety Executive and the EU's Glyphosate task force. Highways, Parks & Cleansing are prepared to produce an online questionnaire which Ward members may share with their constituents to gather views on accepted increased weed growth Vs use of GBHs.

- c) The Council should investigate what alternatives other Councils are looking at. Perhaps the Council could trial different approaches in certain areas to assess effectiveness, whereby a cost comparison could also be identified versus current method, and could be replicated elsewhere**

The Highways department will investigate alternative practices claimed to have been used by other authorities within the APSE report. The Parks Department are about to commence a trial on an alternative method of eradication. Realistic comparison of effectiveness will take up to 3 years for results to be available. It should be noted this is for specific localised treatments such as Japanese Knotweed.

d) The Panel would like to know about the planned highway weed treatment programme and when sprays are taking place

Information is available on www.swansea.gov.uk/weeds regularity is weather dependent.

e) The Council should look to increasing community responsibility for weed management, without the use of glyphosate spraying, and explore ways that this could be achieved e.g. Friends of Parks Groups, other community groups etc.

The Council will always look to encourage community engagement in supporting local initiatives and where local community groups show interest in such activities they will be supported.

f) The Panel would ask you to consider not using glyphosate at the next occasion of wildflower sowing to see the difference and consider whether it can therefore be avoided in the future, perhaps with manual intervention if necessary. A discussion on wildflower / meadow management would be useful at a future meeting

The Parks Department is willing to carry this out in a designated area on a trial basis. The costs associated with the purchase of wildflower seeds and the manpower that would be involved to apply this wholesale across the authority represents a financial risk. It should be noted that the practice of spraying prior to sowing is to ensure there is no competition for nutrients and allow the wildflower the best opportunity to flourish. The alternative is to manual turnover the areas and remove all current growth prior to sowing however the department does not have the necessary resource to deliver the scheme in this very labour intensive way.

g) The Panel would appreciate some information about the Japanese knotweed pilot in terms of success and current position.

There are two publicised studies/pilots in Wales relating to the tackling of Japanese Knotweed. Information about the first study led by Swansea University is available on their website (and link below). The second Welsh Assembly Government sponsored project is to introduce an insect (aphalara itadori) to control the weed. That project is ongoing and information may be found on link below.

<https://www.swansea.ac.uk/press-office/news-archive/2018/swanseauniversityscientistsleadthewayintacklingjapaneseknotweed.php>

Air Pollution Control

- a) **Please share with us the output from the engine idling study carried out in Sketty**

The engine idling study took place between Wednesday 13th February 2019 and Friday 15th February 2019 on Vivian Road, Sketty. The study looked at the use of behavioural message signs and whether or not drivers turned their engines off whilst stationary at the traffic lights. During the study period an air quality analyser was present to record 1min concentrations of Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) and Particulate Matter (PM). The study was carried out in collaboration with Swansea University, the initial analysis has shown a statistically significant increase in the number of engines switched off in the afternoon sessions when the messaging signs were present. Swansea University is in the process of analysing the complete dataset with a view to submitting for publication in a peer reviewed journal.

- b) **We would like to know more about green infrastructure works in the pipeline**

Installation works for the Green Screen in St. Thomas (at the junction of Fabian Way and Port Tennant Road) commenced on Tuesday 25th February 2020. The screen covers a distance of 33m along the inside of the existing pedestrian railings. This scheme has been facilitated through Green Infrastructure funding secured by the Conservation Team from Welsh Government. There is an air quality monitoring station already sited at this location monitoring PM2.5 and NOx and recording 1min sound pressure readings. The intention is carry out statistical analysis of the pollutant data and the traffic data to inform future policy interventions within the Air Quality Action Plan.

- c) **Can you confirm whether the provision of bike storage facilities around schools is something that could be delivered within the Active Travel Fund Grant and report back to us on this?**

Officers have confirmed that the provision of bike storage facilities around schools could be considered as part of the Welsh Government annual funding cycles. Discussions will take place to look at the feasibility of incorporating the possible provision within future funding applications.

- d) **We were interested in which parts of Swansea had the highest rates of correlation between air pollution and deprivation / health inequalities, and what is being done to communicate important air quality information and a dvice to the public to encourage behaviour change**

Public Health Wales has carried out research into this topic and is the appropriate body to look into these statistics. An invitation has been received for Council officers to attend the first draft air quality surveillance dashboard session at the

end of March 2020 and a further update will be provided in writing by the end of April 2020.

- e) **The Panel is interested to know the Authority's response to the Welsh Government's draft Clean Air Plan for Wales, which we presume you will lead on**

The Council's response to the Clean Air Plan for Wales consultation is being prepared and officers are attending a workshop being held in Cardiff on 5th March 2020. The submission date is 10th March 2020 and so a complete copy of the written submission will be forwarded to the Panel after that date.

- f) **Could you tell us what work is being done regarding the decommissioning of electric vehicle batteries**

Further enquires will be made with 3rd party companies to establish the works being carried out in this field. Currently the Council utilises 3rd party end of life vehicle/recycling companies when disposing of vehicle batteries collected at the civic amenity sites.

- g) **The Panel would like a statement regarding Council activity and progress in relation to each of the recommendations in the Welsh Government Policy Guidance.**

Welsh Government's Local air quality management (LAQM) in Wales policy guidance, June 2017, includes several recommendations. The work surrounding the previous responses (a-f) also takes consideration of the recommendations within the decision making approach.

The Council implements the requirements of the Wellbeing and Future Generations Act 2015 (WFG) when carrying out its LAQM functions. This includes the long-term assessment of the areas of concerns and the collection of datasets, collaborative works with partners such as Swansea University and will be implemented throughout the draft Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) to be produced for consultation with communities shortly.

The Council applies the 'long-term' goal as part of the LAQM function. The Annual Progress Report (APR) is submitted to Welsh Government for appraisal and data for 2018 has indicated compliance across the Council's area. Exposure reduction is considered when assessing planning applications of all scales, is considered as part of the AQAP process and is the driver behind the application to install a 'Green Screen' in the St. Thomas area.

The Council provides comments and imposes conditions at the planning stage of developments to look at the implications for soundscape in line with Welsh Government Policy. As part of the 'Green Screen' installation, in St Thomas, a sound level meter is also present to assess the effect upon soundscape for future policy interventions.

'Maintaining and enhancing Swansea's Natural Resources and Biodiversity' is one of the Council's six corporate priorities. Welsh Government's recommendations are considered when undertaking works supporting the

priority. The Council has formed a Climate Change Working Group to ensure that all plans and policies are aligned and integrated where appropriate.

The Council has been involved in collaborative research works with third parties to look at the possibility of grant funding applications to create networks of relevant organisations, for example, the Council, Swansea University and Public Health Wales. The aim is to set up networks of professionals to work towards understanding and evidencing long-term risks to vulnerable groups to air pollution in many environments.

Yours sincerely



Y Cynghorydd / Councillor Mark Thomas
Aelod Y Cabinet Dros Wasanaethau'r Amgylchedd
Cabinet Member for Environment Services