

Progress Review 2012 Summary

Foreword

Since the Swansea Environment Strategy was first published in 2006 the profile of the environment has grown and the latest strategy review points to good progress being made in many aspects of environmental action in Swansea.

To take waste as an example, the kerbside recycling scheme has expanded and alternate weekly collections have been introduced, resulting in a huge increase in the amount of household waste being diverted from landfill for reuse, recycling and composting. The Welsh Government has also introduced a charging scheme for single-use carrier bags which has had a noticeable impact on the way we shop and the waste and litter this used to create.

The quality of the natural and built environment has a significant impact on health, the economy and everyday life. As new national policies and European directives are driving up standards for water and air quality, carbon reduction and the protection of biodiversity, it is crucial that the progress we have seen in Swansea in recent years is maintained and extended.

Swansea Environmental Forum would like to thank the many individuals, organisations and partnerships that have helped progress the Environment Strategy priorities and seek their support in taking further steps forward in the coming years.

**Reena Owen, Chairperson of Swansea Environmental Forum,
Director of Environment for City and County of Swansea, August 2012**

Our Vision for Swansea

The Swansea Environment Strategy – *Time to Change* – was published by Swansea Environmental Forum (SEF) in September 2006. It sets out a vision for Swansea as a place where local people have good opportunities for work, learning and leisure but where: the natural environment is safeguarded and improved; everyone understands and values the environment and tries to live more sustainably; and the quality of life of others around the world is respected.

The Strategy is arranged around five themes: the Natural Environment and Biodiversity; the Built Environment and Energy Use; Water, Land and Waste Management; Sustainable Transport and Air Quality; and Environmental

Awareness and Action. Each theme has an overarching vision and a set of strategic priorities (or aims).

SEF made a commitment to regularly monitor progress and publish its findings. This document provides a summary of the third strategy review, which was undertaken in Spring 2012. A full review report is available at www.swanseaenvironmentalforum.net.

Putting it into Action

There have been three Environment Strategy Action Plans produced so far, each covering a two-year period: 2006–08, 2008–10 and 2010–12. These action plans illustrate how local organisations are contributing towards the 22 strategic priorities outlined in the Strategy.

The first two action plans included approximately 150 specific actions, of which about 60% of actions were completed. The third action plan included nearly 280 actions, reflecting the wider range of contributors being engaged in the process. The overall completion rate has increased to 75% and the achievements under each of the five strategy themes range from 68% to 84%.

Sharing the Priorities

In 2008, SEF identified five key issues that it believed could only be addressed through high level commitment and greater collaboration between organisations, namely, improving air quality, carbon management, protecting biodiversity, adapting for climate change and dealing with water quality in Swansea Bay.

This review found evidence of some progress being made in each of these key areas – particularly in terms of research, training and partnership – but it also points to more effort and resources being needed if significant change is to be achieved.

Assessment Process

The strategy review focuses primarily on an assessment of progress made towards achieving the 22 strategic priorities presented in the Environment Strategy. To assess progress, data was gathered relating to a set of indicators, the actions proposed in the most recent action plan and additional data and actions that came to light during discussions with partners.

Each strategic priority has been assigned a RAG (red, amber, green) status to provide a very simple indication of progress. This was based on an assessment of the evidence gathered during the review.

This table provides a summary of progress for the 22 strategic priorities identified in the Swansea Environment Strategy.

| Theme | Strategic Priorities |
|--|---|
| The Natural Environment and Biodiversity | NE1: Establish and maintain data on the natural environment and monitor change |
| | NE2: Protect and safeguard our valued natural assets and halt loss of biodiversity |
| | NE3: Maintain and enhance the quality and diversity of the natural environment |
| | NE4: Promote awareness, access and enjoyment of the natural environment |
| The Built Environment and Energy Use | BE1: Improve the quality and attractiveness of the city centre, other settlements, neighbourhoods and streetscapes |
| | BE2: Promote sustainable buildings and more efficient use of energy |
| | BE3: Ensure the supply of high-quality, affordable and social housing within mixed, settled and inclusive communities |
| | BE4: Protect and promote historic buildings and heritage sites |
| Water, Land and Waste Management | WM1: Protect and improve river and ground water |
| | WM2: Maintain and improve bathing and drinking water quality |
| | WM3: Restrict development on flood plains, reduce flood risk and improve flood awareness |
| | WM4: Restore contaminated land ensuring minimum risks to the environment and public health |
| | WM5: Reduce waste going to landfill and increase reuse, recycling and composting |
| | WM6: Provide and develop suitable sites and sustainable technologies for dealing with waste |
| Sustainable Transport and Air Quality | ST1: Promote more sustainable forms of travel and transport |
| | ST2: Improve access to services, workplaces and community facilities |
| | ST3: Improve air quality and reduce air pollution |
| | ST4: Improve air quality monitoring and reporting mechanisms |
| Environmental Awareness and Action | EA1: Encourage and support good practice in ESGC in local education establishments |
| | EA2: Actively promote sustainable living |
| | EA3: Promote active citizenship and increased participation in decision-making processes |
| | EA4: Encourage good environmental practice amongst organisations and businesses |

GREEN = good progress has been made towards achieving the strategic priority

AMBER = some progress has been made but the breadth or rate of progress could be improved

RED = insufficient progress is being made and more decisive action is needed

Summary of Progress

Though several local organisations continue to undertake surveys of species and habitats, a more co-ordinated approach to monitoring change and better use of recording systems is still needed.

More management plans are being put in place for important local sites and actions taken to improve ecological features. Training is being provided to improve understanding of why and how valuable natural assets should be protected.

New habitats are being created, improved and brought into active management by a range of organisations and community volunteers but the amount of land managed under agri-environment schemes has reduced, perhaps due to scheme changes.

There is some evidence that more people are visiting the natural environment in Swansea and that more information, interpretation and organised activity is being made available to help people make the most of the experience.

Some significant redevelopment work is underway in Swansea city centre and some outlying settlements and there is evidence to suggest that street cleanliness and public satisfaction with their local neighbourhoods has improved.

An increasing number of new developments and refurbishment projects in Swansea are incorporating energy efficiency and other sustainable building measures. Carbon emissions are beginning to be monitored and reduction targets achieved.

The supply of affordable and social housing in Swansea is not meeting current demands. Though improvements continue to be made to social housing stock, the Welsh Housing Quality Standard is projected not to be met for some time.

Some major heritage projects are underway in Swansea and a new group has been formed to help raise the profile of Swansea's heritage and support collaborative work.

A new more stringent system for assessing water quality in rivers and other water bodies has been introduced. Continued collaboration between key organisations is helping to address pollution sources and work towards higher standards.

A comprehensive research project involving extensive sampling and modelling will improve understanding of bathing water quality in Swansea Bay and enable authorities to target resources and comply with new regulations.

Awareness of flood risk is improving and the number of properties at high risk in Swansea has fallen. Continued flood awareness campaigns, informed planning controls and a major project in the Lower Swansea Valley will bring further progress.

The restoration of contaminated land in Swansea continues to be dependent on development projects rather than a proactive programme of work. The mapping of contaminated land remains incomplete.

Recycling and composting in Swansea continue to increase, waste going to landfill is falling and fly tipping is reducing. Recycling services are being improved and promoted to increase participation and meet ever more challenging targets.

Plans are progressing for regional facilities to deal with food waste and residual waste.

Public transport facilities have been improved in Swansea but car use remains the dominant form of travel for most people. However, there is some evidence that cycle use is increasing and park and ride patronage is holding up.

An increasing number of organisations and schools in the Swansea area are preparing and developing travel plans. Access to facilities within Swansea remains good but the frequency of public transport services to and from Swansea has fallen.

Air quality in Swansea continues to be a concern and the Air Quality Management Area has been extended to reflect an increased number of failures across the City.

A high level of air quality monitoring and reporting is being maintained in Swansea but proposed personal alerting systems have yet to be developed.

Most education establishments in Swansea are making good progress within national and local ESDGC schemes. Despite financial pressures and competing priorities, schools are still participating in environmental education activities.

The number and range of activities, community groups and information sources that support and promote sustainable living in Swansea continue to increase.

Volunteering opportunities continue to grow, along with the number and range of groups, projects and partnerships involved in environmental activity in Swansea, many with an emphasis on community engagement and collaboration.

Good environmental practice continues to be highlighted and promoted through Sustainable Swansea projects. The number of organisations participating in Green Dragon Environmental Standards is still low but other schemes are also being used.

How Are We Doing?

The review suggests progress is being made in each of the Environment Strategy's five themes but also that further work and resourcing is needed.

The Natural Environment and Biodiversity

Much work has been done in mapping green space and sites of ecological value in Swansea and there is increased collaboration in the improvement, management and promotion of the natural environment. There is also evidence to suggest that the number of people accessing the natural environment is continuing to rise, with an increase in the number and range of activities available.

Recognising the value of our natural assets, and the contribution they can make towards health and wellbeing and the economy, will help safeguard them from development and climate change.

The Built Environment and Energy Use

Whilst some major regeneration projects are progressing, such as the Boulevard scheme, the economic slowdown is having an impact on others.

The shortfall in social housing provision has grown and although the Council and housing associations are making improvements to their properties, full compliance with the Welsh Housing Quality Standard remains a major challenge.

The reduction of energy use and carbon emissions in Swansea is now being championed through the new Low Carbon Swansea project which involves a broad partnership and has high-level support.

The protection and promotion of the built heritage in Swansea was highlighted in the 2010 strategic review as needing greater attention. In response, SEF initiated a new partnership to bring together interested organisations and individuals which are working together to address this.

Water, Land and Waste Management

A major research project has been undertaken in Swansea Bay which should help identify the best ways to improve water quality, comply with new regulations and work towards new standards that are being introduced across Europe.

Progress is being made in reducing flood risk in Swansea through awareness campaigns, better mapping and modelling, and a major new flood management project in the Lower Swansea Valley.

The remediation of contaminated land in Swansea is still dependent on regeneration projects and is not currently being monitored effectively. Further resources may be needed to address this.

Significant progress is still being made in the way we deal with our waste but as national targets increase, this will become more challenging. Regional collaboration to establish shared treatment facilities for waste is continuing and making progress in relation to food waste.

Sustainable Transport and Air Quality

Improvements to public transport infrastructure in Swansea, such as the new bus station and enhancements to the train station, are helping to make public transport a more attractive travel option but much more is required if car use and the associated air pollution and congestion are to be reduced.

Whilst the monitoring of air pollution in Swansea is still at a high standard, air quality remains a major concern and the Swansea Air Quality Management Area has been extended.

Environmental Awareness and Action

Evidence suggests that most local schools, colleges and universities are engaging in environmental management schemes and providing environmental education activities, but further support may be needed to ensure that this continues in the face of other priorities.

Several projects and organisations, such as the Sustainable Swansea Initiative, continue to promote environmental good practice and encourage sustainable lifestyles but it is difficult to measure their impact or to see if they lead to significant change.

Where Next?

Swansea Environmental Forum will continue to promote environmental improvements in Swansea and work closely with partners both within and beyond the environmental sector towards the vision set out in the Swansea Environment Strategy. The fourth Environment Strategy Action Plan was published in July 2012 outlining work that will contribute to this over the next two years.

SEF will continue to have particular focus on the five shared priorities and other issues highlighted in this and previous strategy reviews.

In the current economic climate and with increasing financial constraints, it will be crucial to emphasise that the quality of the natural and built environment supports health, education, community development and economic regeneration, and is essential to a sustainable future.



For a copy of the full progress review report or for further information about the aims and activities of Swansea Environmental Forum please visit www.swanseaenvironmentalforum.net or call 01792 480200.