

Progress Review 2014 Summary

The first two action plans (2006-08 and 2008-10) included approximately 150 specific actions of which about 60% of actions were completed. The third and fourth action plans (2010-12 and 2012-14) each included over 250 actions, reflecting a wider range of organisations contributing to the process. The overall completion rate for these two action plans increased to 75% with achievements under each of the five themes ranging from 60% to 80%.

Shared Priorities

Through work with other strategic bodies and the resulting from progress reviews, SEF has identified a number of issues that it believes can only be addressed effectively with high level commitment and through collaboration between organisations. These include improving air quality, reducing carbon emissions, protecting biodiversity, improving water quality and safeguarding our built heritage.

SEF and its partners have established projects and task groups to tackle these issues and the recent reviews have indicated that good progress is being made in each of these but also points to greater effort and more resources being needed if significant change is to be seen.

Assessment Process

The progress reviews focuses primarily on progress towards achieving the 22 priorities presented in the strategy. Data is collected for a large set of performance indicators and information gathered on the extent to which actions proposed in the most recent action plan have been delivered. Additional data and actions that come to light during discussions with partners are also taken into account. Each strategic priority is assigned a RAG status (red, amber, green) to provide a simple indication of progress based on an assessment of all the evidence gathered during the review.

Foreword

Swansea Environmental Forum (SEF) is the lead strategic partnership for all aspects of the natural and built environment in the City and County of Swansea. This role includes managing and monitoring the Swansea Environment Strategy – *Time to Change*. This summary outlines the findings of a strategy progress review undertaken in 2014.

A decade has passed since work first began on the strategy and in that time there have been numerous changes to our urban environment, public transport, the way we deal with waste, how natural assets are protected, and the way many other environmental issues are addressed.

In many ways, things have improved – waste separation for recycling has become normal practice for most of us and standards for energy efficiency and housing quality have risen significantly – but we still face many challenges to ensure that the quality of our environment and what it provides us can be maintained and enhanced.

SEF would like to thank the many individuals, organisations and partnerships that contribute to furthering the strategy priorities and help to make Swansea a better place to live, work and visit.

SEF Executive Committee, January 2015

Our Vision for Swansea

The Swansea Environment Strategy was published by Swansea Environmental Forum 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 our natural assets are looked after and improved; where everyone understands and values the natural environment and tries to live more sustainably; and where the quality of life of others around the world and in the future is respected.

The strategy is arranged around five key 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 of these themes' theme has an overarching vision and a set of priorities (or strategic aims).

SEF made a commitment to regularly monitor progress and publish its findings. This document is a summary of the fourth progress review, which covers the period April 2012 to March 2014.' A full report is available at www.swanseaenvironmentalforum.net

Words into Action

Dozens of organisations across Swansea contribute to delivering the priorities outlined in the strategy. Many of their aspirations and actions are collated in two-year action plans that are produced alongside the strategy reviews and present proposed actions under the five themes.

This table provides a summary of progress made from April 2012 to March 2014 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 ESDGC 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

Some developments have been made to support the monitoring of the natural environment in Swansea but suitable indicators have not yet been agreed.

Work continues on preparing management plans for important local sites and providing training on why and how valuable natural assets should be protected. Further resources will be needed if natural assets are to be safeguarded into the future.

An increasing amount of land in Swansea is being brought into active management by a range of organisations and community volunteers. However, the area of land managed under agri-environment agreements dropped sharply after scheme changes.

There have been notable improvements to the Rights of Way network and a number of natural sites across Swansea. Several new walk leaflets and site guides have been published and new interpretation panels erected.

Some significant developments are ongoing in central Swansea but some regeneration work has been held back because of the financial climate. Street cleanliness and public satisfaction with their local neighbourhoods remains high.

Greater investment is being made into energy efficiency and other sustainable building measures for housing and non-domestic properties. Carbon emissions are increasingly being monitored and reductions are being achieved by many organisations.

Improvements continue to be made to both social and private housing in Swansea but housing supply is still not meeting current or future demands.

Good progress has been made in safeguarding some of Swansea's historic buildings and improving access to and interpretation of important heritage sites but some key buildings have been lost and many are still at risk.

A new more stringent system for assessing the health of waterbodies has been introduced. Collaboration between organisations is helping in the efforts to address pollution sources and deliver innovative community engagement projects.

A comprehensive research project involving extensive sampling and modelling has improved understanding of bathing water quality in Swansea Bay and is enabling a targeted approach to improving water quality to meet new standards.

There has been significant investment in reducing flood risk and raising awareness of flood risk, particularly in the Lower Swansea Valley.

The restoration of contaminated land in Swansea continues to be achieved through development projects rather than a proactive programme of work and the mapping of contaminated land remains incomplete.

Recycling and composting in Swansea continue to increase, driven by extensive and targeted promotion. Waste going to landfill continues to fall but at a slower rate and fly tipping incidents have increased a little after falling significantly over previous years.

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

Cycling in Swansea appears to be increasing and facilities for cyclists are improving but car use still dominates. Some bus services are reducing and the use of park and ride facilities in Swansea has fallen.

Ease of access to facilities and services within Swansea is perceived to be generally good. Many organisations continue to produce and develop travel plans.

Air quality in Swansea is still a concern and policies that aim to increase inner city dwellings and café type environments may increase the number of people exposed to poor air quality in the City Centre.

The level of air quality monitoring and reporting in Swansea remains high and the number of hits on the Swansea Air Quality website continues to increase.

Many education establishments in Swansea are making progress with national and local sustainability schemes. Some local environmental education providers have seen a drop in school visits but the range of providers and activities has increased.

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

Whilst the number of volunteers with some organisations has fallen, the range of volunteering opportunities continues to grow along with the number and range of groups, projects and partnerships involved in environmental activity in Swansea.

Local organisations continue to participate in environmental management and standards schemes and good practice is celebrated through the Swansea Sustainability Trail, the Sustainable Swansea Awards and other award schemes.

How Are We Doing?

The review suggests progress is being made in each of the strategy's five key themes but that in some areas further work and more resources are needed.

The Natural Environment and Biodiversity

A number of Council-led and partnership projects have been undertaken in recent years to encourage greater engagement with the countryside and our natural assets. The number and range of events and activities has increased and many more interpretative materials have been produced to help people enjoy and learn about nature.

Suitable indicators for measuring biodiversity loss still need to be agreed and a number of non native invasive species continue to spread. The decline in public sector funding/resources is also having an impact.

The Built Environment and Energy Use

The European Boulevard and Urban Village schemes have both progressed but some regeneration plans for the City Centre have been delayed. Whilst progress has been made in safeguarding some of Swansea's built heritage, many valuable buildings and sites are still at risk.

The quality of existing social housing across Swansea is being improved and new properties, both domestic and non-domestic, are being built to increasingly high standards of energy efficiency. However, the supply of affordable housing is still not meeting demand and the Council is considering new ways to address this issue.

The Low Carbon Swansea project has helped organisations, particularly in the public sector, to work together to reduce their carbon emissions and energy use.

Water, Land and Waste Management

Meeting the new standards for water quality remains a major challenge, particularly for Swansea Bay. The Clear Streams partnership project has helped to raise the profile of the water environment in Swansea and encouraged greater community engagement with local waterbodies.

Significant investment has been made to reduce flood risk and improve awareness of flood risk in the Lower Swansea Valley.

The management of contaminated land in Swansea is still poorly resourced and remediation remains dependent on new developments taking place.

Civic amenity sites have been improved and rebranded as Household Waste Recycling Centres. The proportion of waste from kerbside collections and recycling centres that is recycled and composted has continued to increase and the waste going to landfill continues to fall. Regional facilities for food waste and residual waste are still to be established.

Sustainable Transport and Air Quality

Reductions in subsidies and grants to support bus services is resulting in some bus services being reduced or cut. There is evidence that cycling is becoming more popular but car use still dominates travel for work, shopping and leisure.

Air pollution in some parts of Swansea exceeds EU limits and an increasing number of other areas are close to exceeding these limits. New road signs in central areas will encourage drivers to divert when air quality is poor but more action may be needed to tackle the problem and avoid additional air quality management areas being declared.

Environmental Awareness and Action

There is a growing range of activities and events in Swansea which support environmental education, promote sustainable living and encourage environmental volunteering. Many organisations are collaborating and taking part in partnership projects to improve the environment and reduce the negative impact of their activities.

Where Next?

Swansea Environmental Forum will continue to work closely with others, both within and beyond the environmental sector, towards the vision set out in the Swansea Environment Strategy. The fifth action plan was published in November 2014 outlining some of the work that will contribute to this over the next two years.

SEF will also contribute to overarching strategic partnerships such as the Local Service Board and the Healthy City Initiative, and will focus its resources on making greater progress with the shared priorities and the projects and task groups that seek to address these.

The ecosystems approach being adopted by Natural Resources Wales and the Welsh Government offers an opportunity to emphasise the importance of the natural environment for health and wellbeing, the economy, education and community development, and the need to work in an integrated way towards a sustainable future.

This approach will be further strengthened when the Future Generations Bill and the Environment Bill come into force in 2016.