



## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY PANEL**

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN, ON THURSDAY, 10TH APRIL 2014 AT 5.00 PM**

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#### **PRESENT:**

Councillor K. James - Chairman  
Councillor D. Havard - Vice Chairman

#### **Councillors:**

M. Adams, Mrs A. Blackman, C. Elsbury, S. Kent, C.P. Mann, J.A. Pritchard

#### **Together with:**

P. Cooke (Team Leader, Sustainable Development & Living Environment), P. Rossiter (Energy and Water Officer), S.M. Kauczok (Committee Services Officer).

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Mrs P. Cook and K. Dawson,

#### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made at the beginning or during the course of the meeting.

#### **3. MINUTES**

The minutes of the Sustainable Development Advisory Panel meeting held on 16th January 2014 (minute nos. 1-6; page nos. 1-4) were approved and signed as a correct record.

#### **4. PRESENTATION: HEALTHY RIVERS PROGRAMME**

The Panel received a presentation by Bryan Dando, Groundwork Caerphilly, on the Healthy Rivers Programme, which has been funded by Natural Resources Wales (NRW), South East Wales Rivers Trust and Caerphilly CBC to undertake environmental improvements to the River Sirhowy to improve its ecological status under the Water Framework Directive.

The main aim and objectives of the programme are to achieve good ecological status for the river; to increase the population of migratory fish by removing or modifying barriers to fish migration; to educate local people about the river eco system and to promote angling in the area.

The area was heavily industrialised in the past and large quantities of sediment from the mining of iron and coal escaped into the river earning it the local nickname of 'The Black River'.

The industry also made structural changes to the river channel and man-made weirs were installed which consequently created barriers to fish migration. Gibbs Weir was the first and largest barrier to fish migration on the river. Installed in the 1960s as part of a project to straighten the river to create space for a new industrial estate at Penmaen, it created a barrier that was too large for migratory fish to clear and they therefore became trapped or would die from exhaustion. The fish also became easy targets for poachers. In 2013 the weir was removed by NRW and replaced by a rock ramp, which has created a number of small weirs across the river channel, which fish can easily leap over. Healthy Rivers also coordinated a similar project at Penmaen Weir. Whilst it was not possible to remove the weir completely due to bank stability concerns and a gas pipe crossing the river upstream, a contractor was hired to install a block stone pre-barrage. This has created two small jumps for migratory fish rather than one large one.

As part of the scheme, a number of trees, which had fallen into the river around Chartist Bridge during the winter storms had also been removed and the timber used to construct a river deflector to direct the main flow away from the river bank. Some tree trunks were also used to protect the river bank from further erosion. The project had been very successful and the deflector and bank revetments survived the winter floods.

A scheme to increase water depth in low flows at Markham Colliery Tunnel had been completed in March. This was achieved by installing a length of timber across the secondary channel to direct the water into the centre in low flow conditions. In high flow conditions the water would simply flow over the timber into the secondary channel. A number of large trees around the mouth of the tunnel were also removed to ensure that they did not cause damage to the concrete structure. Healthy Rivers had also been working with volunteers to carry out river clean ups and improvement projects at various locations along the River Sirhowy and had initiated the 'Salmon in the Classroom' project to enable school children to learn about the life cycle of salmon and environmental issues affecting local rivers. South East Wales Rivers Trust has provided a second batch of salmon eggs to allow Healthy Rivers to continue the project.

The Healthy Rivers programme was set up as an initial 12 month pilot by the funders. Due to the success of the project Welsh Water has agreed to fund it for a further 12 months and has allowed it to expand onto other rivers. Natural Resources Wales has also decided to add some funding based on the work that has been carried out.

The Chair thanked Bryan for his very interesting presentation and a question and answer session ensued. It was noted that the Healthy Rivers programme will continue to strive to achieve its aims and in doing so will deliver high quality, good value for money projects that will increase populations of migratory fish in the local rivers and ensure the long term sustainability of the programme.

## **5. WATER CONSERVATION**

The report summarises progress made in relation to water conservation. The annual charge for water across the Authority is approximately £730k per annum based on finance records. The Energy Management Team is working to strengthen all aspects of water conservation, including capturing water bill data, additional reporting and benchmarking. There will also be physical improvements to save cost and consumption such as downsizing water meters to reduce standing charges and by implementing water conservation products where practicable.

During Climate Week 2013 Welsh Water and Aqualogic set up a demonstration stall at Penallta House to promote water conservation technologies. Those that participated received a £50 product pack containing water conservation devices for the house and garden.

In 2013 the Energy Management Team obtained £52k worth of investment from Welsh Water. The investment was a combination of water audits for high use schools and leisure facilities. The recommendations from the audits eg. urinal controls, push taps and in line flow restrictions in taps, were paid for and installed free of charge by Welsh Water. The technical payback rate on Welsh Water's investment across all of the 50 plus buildings was within a two year period. Welsh Water calculated that this would save the Authority 44,000 cubic meters of water, with an average building saving of 39% of consumption.

The School Budget Forum asked if all remaining schools could receive the audit and investment from Welsh Water. Welsh Water offered to pay for the installation and water conservation devices if the schools paid for the audits. A primary school audit was costed at £250. When the remaining schools were contacted, however, only 4 expressed an interest. A suggestion was made that the Education for Sustainable Development Officer contact the schools to try and persuade them of the benefits and savings that could be generated by taking up the offer.

The Panel were informed that that there will be a drive to reduce water meter sizes where reasonable and practicable. Oversized meters incur a higher standing charge. By downsizing from an 80mm to a 50mm meter can save £1,510 in standing charges per meter per year. To downsize accurately a data log flow will be required which will enable the correct sized meter to be identified. This has been undertaken at Pontllanfraith Comprehensive School where it had been discovered that the water meter size at this site should be 40mm, therefore saving £2,145 in standing charges per year. The cost of the meter exchange would be £1,200 giving a payback rate of below 12 months.

It is proposed that the Authority report annually on Penallta House, Pontllanfraith House and several other key properties as a starting point for benchmarking water consumption. These will be reported through to Welsh Government. As additional data is collated the key buildings and building groups eg. leisure centres with swimming pools, will be added to this reporting function in due course.

The Panel noted the progress made to date and supported the additional reporting functions. In addition, the recommended improvements on the downsizing of water meters and the implementation of water conservation technologies where practicable, were endorsed.

## **6. SOLAR FLARES AND SEVERE SPACE WEATHER**

The report provided information on the nature, occurrence and effect of solar flares and severe space weather, as requested at a meeting of the Panel.

A solar flare is one of a number of different types of solar phenomena that together make up space weather. They are often, but not always, followed by a coronal mass ejection (CME). When a CME is directed towards Earth and reaches it as an interplanetary CME (ICME) the shock wave of the travelling mass of solar energetic particles causes a geomagnetic storm that may disrupt Earth's magnetosphere. CMEs can trigger geomagnetic storms that have been known to disable satellites and knock out terrestrial electric power grids for extended periods of time.

Solar flares were first observed on the sun by Sir Richard Carrington and independently by Richard Hodgson in 1859. The "Carrington Event" in 1859 is often described as the perfect storm because the largest CMEs, radiation storms and solar flares ever recorded happened during this period. Solar energetic particles can cause particularly strong aurorae in large regions around Earth's magnetic poles. These are also known as the Northern Lights (aurora borealis) in the northern hemisphere and the Southern Lights (aurora australis) in the southern hemisphere.

Each year the UK Government carries out a classified assessment of the risks of civil emergencies facing people in the UK and publishes its findings in the National Risk Register of Civil Emergencies (NRR). In 2013 the NRR indicated the probability of the risk of Severe Space Weather as High rating i.e. the risk was considered highly likely to occur and have the highest impact if it did. Assessment for the NRR is based on a "reasonable worst case scenario".

The Panel thanked the Officer for the informative report and discussion ensued on the information received.

Following consideration of this item a Member requested that an update on the ground source heat pump at Penallta House be presented to a future meeting of the Panel. Members were advised that Officers are currently addressing this matter and that a report would come back to the Panel in due course.

The meeting closed at 6.10 pm.

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any amendments being recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 14th July 2014.

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CHAIRMAN