

Feasibility Study for Port Eynon and Horton Foreshore and Settlements



FINAL REPORT: Executive Summary

December 2018

BRO Partnership





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Mae'r ddogfen hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg / This document is also available in Welsh

Preface and acknowledgement

The BRO Partnership was commissioned by Swansea Council in May 2018 to undertake a feasibility study on Port Eynon and Horton. The work was undertaken over an 8 month period and involved extensive consultation with:

- Staff of Swansea Council
- Port Eynon Community Council
- Village Hall Committee
- Local Area Group (LAG)
- Gower AONB Partnership
- Local business owners
- Residents
- A wide range of stakeholders
- Environmental charities, including Keep Wales Tidy and the National Trust
- Statutory bodies, including NRW and Cadw

In addition, a survey of 100 visitors was undertaken over the summer months.

We are immensely grateful to all the contributors to this feasibility study – for their time, interest and constructive comments.

On most of the issues we identified there was a strong consensus that action needs to be taken. However, there were inevitably different views on some of the proposals, which were occasionally at odds. We hope that this report summarises these differing opinions and at the same time presents options that should be effective and supported by the majority.

Executive Summary

Port Eynon and Horton share a popular beach, though it is accessed by separate roads. Port Eynon retains its character as a traditional coastal village with a strong maritime heritage and contains cafes, a restaurant, beach shop and a public house. Horton is much smaller and quieter. There are extensive caravan and camping sites at both locations, as well as large numbers of holiday lets. During the summer both sites are very popular and occasionally at capacity. However, the tourist season is short and there is far less activity outside the school holiday period.

The feasibility study was commissioned by Swansea Council following a recognition that there was a need to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the foreshore and the management of the area for visitors. The carparks and toilet blocks at both sites, along with the slipway at Port Eynon are owned by Swansea Council. The authority also manages the dune system which extends from Port Eynon to Horton. The study involved a mixture of: community events, meetings with organisations and stakeholders, a survey of visitors, liaison with officers in Swansea Council and the local Councillor. The work also included a photographic and observational survey to understand how the resort operated during peak periods. Several issues emerged from these data gathering exercises and these have been grouped into 20 recommendations for Port Eynon and 7 for Horton.

For Port Eynon, which is under considerable pressure during the height of the season and the main issues relate to the: management of the carpark, poor quality of the toilets, traffic congestion and boat launching. There were also concerns about the large number of signs on the seafront, the road layout near the disabled carparking bays and the quality of the litter bins. In summary, Port Eynon appears neglected and under resourced.

The Village Hall Committee wish to enter into a partnership with Swansea Council to replace the existing toilet block with a modern multi-functional centre which would cater for visitors and provide facilities for residents. This would involve selling the existing village hall and land with planning permission for two or three houses. At the second community meeting organised for this study there was general support for this proposal, provided that the new centre did not include a restaurant which would compete with existing businesses. The proposed new centre could solve many of the main issues identified at Port Eynon, notably those relating to the management of the car park, the condition of the toilet and boat launching procedures on the slipway. The 7 recommendations for Horton relate to: car parking, the condition of the toilet

block, pedestrian access to the beach, the condition of boardwalks and the interpretation of the dunes.

The complete set of recommendations have been grouped into short term (1-3 years), mid term (3-5 years) and longer term (5-10) actions. Once Swansea Council have considered this report and agreed a way forward there will be a need to liaise with several organisations to coordinate delivery.

1.0 Introduction and background to the study

In May 2018 the BRO Partnership (BRO) were commissioned by Swansea Council, on behalf of the Swansea Rural Development Programme's Local Action Group (LAG), to undertake an independent and comprehensive feasibility study on Port Eynon and Horton. The study was completed in December 2018.

Swansea Council service and operate a number of facilities at Port Eynon and Horton, including: toilet facilities, car parks, boat parking and a slipway. The brief for the study highlighted that a number of these are by now outdated and could be modernised to meet growing demand and changing visitor expectations. Swansea Council also manage the dune ecosystem and access routes that are situated to the rear of the beach. The coastal strip on either side of Port Eynon and Horton are designated as Sites of Special Scientific interest (SSSI), whilst Port Eynon Bay, from the low water mark is part of the Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Port Eynon and Horton are also part of the Gower Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) designation. See Appendix 7.

Port Eynon is one of three beaches in Swansea awarded the Blue Flag, an international recognition of the highest environmental and quality standards. The Blue Flag award is hugely beneficial to the local economy.

Port Eynon has a rich maritime heritage, including two outstanding historical structures in the Salthouse and the nearby Culver Hole. The traditional character of the village has been somewhat overshadowed by modern development and the establishment of large caravan and camping parks. Nevertheless, the village retains a considerable charm and provides access to a very popular beach, as well as outstanding coastal scenery and wildlife.

Swansea Council recognise that Port Eynon doesn't function to its full potential during the summer period when the foreshore becomes a 'honey pot' for visitors. Overcrowding, poor signage and the road layout leads to confusion and extreme congestion as visitors try to get in and out of the village. These issues have been identified in Swansea Council's Beaches Management Plan (BMP) and its Destination Management Plan (DMP).

Despite these weaknesses, Port Eynon remains popular with visitors. In 2011, Port Eynon was voted the Best British Beach by Cadbury Flake 99 Great British Beach Awards, beating competition from around the UK.

The beach has also recently seen a rise in alternative sports, particularly activities such as stand-up paddle boarding and coasteering. Combined with an active boat club and a newly established rowing club at Port Eynon, the beach remains very popular with visitors.

The continuing popularity of Port Eynon could however be undermined by the lack of high quality amenities that would be expected at a busy tourist destination, including: suitable toilets, changing spaces, storage, boat launching and disabled access to the beach and viewing areas.

Horton, on the other hand is quieter, with a much smaller car park, a toilet block, but no shops or other amenities. Horton is therefore under far less intense pressure compared to Port Eynon and requires less attention. However, for this study, we have taken an integrated view and considered both settlements and beaches as closely linked destinations.

Through undertaking this in-depth research the Council aims to identify and evidence the issues highlighted above and adopt a holistic approach in managing development. The study included an assessment of the following issues at Port Eynon and Horton:

- The general amenities and appeal of both beaches
- The suitability of toilets and showers
- Parking arrangements
- Road layout and traffic management
- Boat launching
- Lifeguard provision
- Management of the dune ecosystem
- Coastal access and public paths
- Heritage features, such as the Salthouse and Culver Hole
- Public transport provision and promotion.

The study was undertaken through a combination of:

- Face to face or telephone interviews with key stakeholders such as: Cadw, Keep Wales Tidy, RNLI, the Gower Society and the National Trust
- Interviews with local businesses
- Attendance at Swansea Council's Beach Management Group
- Interviews with several Swansea Council staff
- Two open community meetings
- Two meetings with the Village Hall Committee
- Two meetings with the Port Eynon Community Council (an attempt was also made to contact Penrice Community Council but no reply was received)
- Meeting with Councillor Richard Lewis
- Best practice research

- A survey of visitors undertaken on different days throughout the summer.

Further details on the process of data gathering is set out in Section 2.0.

This report combines the above data gathering and analysis and sets out a number of clear recommendations that will greatly enhance the management of Port Eynon and Horton as high quality tourist destinations.

We have grouped these recommendations into:

- Short term (1 -3 years)
- Mid term (3-5 years) and
- Longer term proposals. (5-10 years).

These will require substantial capital investments and our study has involved discussion with Swansea Council's economic regeneration department to identify possible sources of funding for some of these. Ultimately, the proposals will improve the management, visual appearance and appeal of Port Eynon and Horton – benefiting visitors, residents and local businesses.

The recommendations relating to future management and more collaborative action between different departments will also improve efficiency and ultimately reduce revenue costs for Swansea Council.

7.0 Gap analysis and recommendations

7.1 Matrix of issues against 3 main timescale options

The following table combines the issues identified in Port Eynon and Horton with the three options relating to short, mid and long term actions.

7.1.1 Port Eynon

No	Theme	Short term action Years 1-2	Mid term capital investment Years 3-5	Longer term Capital infrastructure Years 5-10	Notes
1	Car parking	Only lock after 11.00 during summer. Remove containers. Relocate meter to main carpark. Review and clarify landownership	Manage as part of new and visitor and beach centre		Existing businesses will be prevented from growing or may go out of business unless urgent action is taken

2	Traffic management	Port Eynon directional road signage. Temporary traffic lights during peak periods	Reduce access for larger vehicles during peak periods	Investigate park and ride traffic management and use of shuttle bus and land train	Lack of access for emergency services is a real threat which must be addressed
3	Toilets	Additional resources during peak periods.	Incorporate in new centre		The toilets were one of the least liked features and are not DDA compliant

4	Disabled car parking and roundabout	Redesign and landscape area, including new welcome sign and heritage feature e.g. anchor			Major opportunity to create more welcoming environment
5	Beach cleanliness and bins	Replace bins with solar powered units			Will improve visual appearance and management
6	Dog fouling and waste bins	Increase number of bins and collection. Awareness raising activities in conjunction with Keep Wales Tidy	Increased enforcement of bylaws		Will have immediate impact a low cost
7	Boat launching	Install electric locks	Managed as part of new centre		Will improve operation, reduce admin and lead to more controlled, safe use
8	Storage of boats and other equipment	Find suitable base for Rowing Club on overspill car park e.g. temporary container until new Centre is built.	Incorporate sufficient space to meet needs of rowing club, RNLI, Lifesaving Club and Ty Bortha. Possibly Gower Coast Adventures may also be interested	Possible mooring for sailing boats near to YHA/Salthouse.	Management of the new centre would need to coordinate the needs of a large number of users.

9	Signage and visitor interpretation	Remove most of existing signage on seafront, retain interpretation panels	New interpretation installed in centre		Will improve visual appearance
10	Landscaping of area around shops	Low cost and high impact improvement			Could be achieved at low cost and would benefit local business and visitors

11	Disabled access to the beach	Use roll out mats. This service could be built into the RNLI's lifeguard contract.	More permanent infrastructure should be provided, as well as special wheelchairs for bathing		This will enhance Port Eynon's reputation as a place where disabled are fully provided for.
12	Lifeguards	Improve signage	Close working relationship with new centre		The lifeguards are essential in retaining Blue Flag status.
13	Management of the dunes	Better interpretation and signage re adds. Maintain boardwalk.	Ongoing maintenance and use of local volunteers		Info could also be provided to caravan site owners to pass onto users
14	Food, shops and other amenities	Visit Wales support for existing businesses and to redevelop Smugglers Haunt and market events	New shops as part of centre		Widening the offer to visitors would increase numbers during off-peak period
15	Improve bus service	Investigate additional services on off peak times. Improve visual appearance of bus stop.	Promote coastal walks which include use of buses as part of the trip.	Possible park and ride at peak times to relief traffic congestion.	More needs to be done to promote availability of public transport. This would encourage coastal walks during shoulder seasons.

16	YHA	Provide turning space for car parking.	Use of part of the overspill car park would be beneficial. Additional public transport in off peak times should be developed.		Provides an iconic and highly valuable service in a historic building.
17	Access and management of the Salthouse	Better signage and surfacing.	Conservation work to building. Improve access.	Disabled access to Salthouse, safe swimming area and additional interpretation	A highly under used local asset.
18	Coastal Access, issues and opportunities	More signage Clearance and surfacing.	Walking festivals, guided walks programme, promoting the area's history. Signs for Culver hole should be low key and emphasis that visitors view it at their own risk.		This would boost tourism during off-peak periods
19	Existing events including Triathlon	Better coordination within Local Authority and liaison with event organisers	Building of a new centre and associated management would make such events run more smoothly.	Develop more off-peak events to lengthen season.	Attracts large numbers but could be managed better.
20	Marketing and identity of Port	Support for local businesses and Ty Borfa to create events.			Emphasis on non-motorised water sports and maritime heritage/wildlife attractions/Dark Skies
	Eynon				

7.1.2 Horton

No	Theme	Short term action Years 1-3	Mid term capital investment Years 3-5	Notes
1	Car parking	Ensure area is kept clean and new solar powered bins installed. More dog waste bins.	Install electric barrier and video camera, which could be operated from new centre at Port Eynon	This car park should remain locked at night, but at a later time. Once the Port Eynon centre has been built then it can be managed from there.
2	Toilet and showers	Ensure high level of cleanliness. Install solar powered showers	New toilet block	A new toilet block will increase use in during the off-peak periods.
3	RNLI station	Improve interpretation.	Possibly relocate RNLI shop to new building at Port Eynon	The Station could have a slightly higher profile.
4	Access to the beach and through dunes	Improve surfacing and signage of main path to beach.		This will allow less abled users and prams to access the beach.
5	Visitor interpretation	Interpretation signs for dunes including notices re adders.		This will complement the interpretation provision at Port Eynon.
6	Visitor facilities and refreshments	License for vendor during the summer.		This will provide additional amenities and help supervise the management of the car park.
7	Access track to Port Eynon	Improve surface and ensure the track is available for use by emergency vehicles.		

7.2 Governance and management of both sites

7.2.1 Short term action (1-3 years)

Develop a local team for Port Eynon and Horton who can deliver across more of the Council's function. This will require some pooling of resources between departments, but would result in more responsive, effective and cheaper management of the Council-owned assets. The team would be responsible for: beach cleanliness and litter, car parking enforcement and cash collection, management of boat launching, dune conservation and footpath clearance and signage. Bringing these functions together into a small team would be highly effective. They would be set ambitious, but realistic targets across the needs of different departments and would operate all year round, undertaking most of the physical improvements e.g. footpath

repairs, during the winter periods. They would also liaise with local businesses, the RNLI, Lifesaving Club and the emergency services.

7.2.2 Mid term action (3-5 years)

Once resources are secured for the new visitor and beach centre at Port Eynon the multi-functional building could be built. The centre should be run by a Community Interest Company, based on the Village Hall Committee and other key stakeholders including: the RNLI, local businesses, the Rowing Club, Boat Club and the Lifesaving Club. There is also the possibility of partnership working with the National trust. The Centre will require a business plan that will ensure its economic viability.

The newly established local Beach Management team would then be based at the centre and their employment could eventually be transferred to the newly established Community Interest Company. This will ultimately lead to more local control, enhance the amenities that Port Eynon and Horton has to offer and reduce revenue costs for the Local Authority.

8.0 Conclusions

This report has identified a number of issues and opportunities for Port Eynon and Horton and then grouped these into short, mid and long term actions.

Consideration has also been given to not taking any action as a result of this report. This will most probably lead to a slow deterioration in Port Eynon's appeal as other destinations improve their offer. It is therefore imperative that Swansea Council does take action. Once the Council have agreed which recommendations to take forward, they will need to liaise with several organisations and local interests to agree a collaborative and inclusive approach.

A number of short-term actions could be achieved with modest budgets and within a 1 to 3 year timescale. Grants are available to support Swansea Council to take these interventions forward.

Considerable additional benefits will be derived through a large new capital build on the main car park. This would see the existing toilet block being replaced by a modern, multi-functional centre, which would be open all year round. This would consolidate the appeal of Port Eynon and ensure its success and popularity as a visitor destination for the foreseeable future.

Whether the longer term capital investment identified in this report are required should be considered once the new Centre and the other improvements to the seafront has been completed. These investments, which include new moorings, a lido, further improvements to the coastal path, should be considered over a 5 to 10 year timeframe.

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