

Foreword from Chair of Trustees

Welcome to our 2018 – 2022 Strategic Plan, which describes a clear and compelling vision for our future, and prioritises our strategic objectives. This is an ambitious plan, which will challenge our thinking and how we currently operate. At the heart of our plan is our love of Gower and our continued wish to safeguard Gower for current and future generations.

Robin Kirby, Chair

Introduction

The Gower Society was founded in 1947 by four enthusiasts, known as the Gowermen, as a history society. Its membership grew and very soon, the embryo society found itself fronting a campaign to halt the proposed building of a Butlins camp at Rhossili. And so, early on it also became a campaigning society. Today, it has members from Gower itself as well as many national and international ones. It is a registered charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) (number 1172919) and continues to be run by volunteers. We are linked with our original registered charity (number 258372).

This strategic plan sets out how we will manage the functions of the Society to meet our published objects. For the purposes of the Charity, Gower includes the whole of the ancient Lordship of Gower.

The objects of the Charity, and for the public benefit ('the Objects') are:

1. To promote the preservation, conservation and enhancement of the physical and natural environment of the area known as Gower by promoting
 - a. The natural beauty of Gower;
 - b. The preservation, protection, development, improvement and care of the land, buildings, antiquities, architecture, traditions and features of historic or public interest;
 - c. High standards of planning in or affecting Gower;
 - d. The encouragement of the inhabitants of Gower and the surrounding area, and the public at large, to take an active interest in the enjoyment and protection of Gower and its heritage.
2. To promote and further the study and recording of Gower's antiquities, traditions, history, geography and natural history, and to further the education of the public in respect of the same;
3. To preserve, protect and promote rights of way and access to Gower's open spaces.

This plan provides the framework for working through the priorities and action plans and the basis for focusing resources. It communicates what is important about the Society and what our future focus will be.

Context

As reported by our Chair at the 2018 Annual General Meeting, the Gower Society is in a healthy financial position, having finances which included investments of nearly £3m following substantial recent inheritances which provide an income that enables the Society to pursue its objects.

Whilst finances are strong, membership is at a static level, at present 898 subscriptions for over 1,400 members.

The Society continues to support and promote a number of annual activities, including its programme of walks, talks and youth events. Whilst some of these were popular, for example, the youth activities and the Archaeology day, others are not well supported by members.

The Society continues to search all planning applications in the last year and had identified 245 of significance, to which the Society had objected only to 27, and made constructive comments on 61.

The Society awards grants for community and school projects that are relevant to its objects. In 2017, grants totalled over £50,000.00. Rarely a year passes without the Society being involved in an important Enquiry. In 2016, it opposed a solar farm development in the AONB (successful) and in 2017, it supported local farming opposition to a wind farm in the north of the Lordship (unsuccessful). In 2018, it supported the Local Planning Authority in its enforcement proceedings in respect of unauthorised engineering relations in a disused quarry intended for residential development, for which permission had been granted (successful).

Vision and Values

Gower is an inspirational place where the Society strives to promote the preservation and enhancement of the physical and natural environment, including the heritage, of the AONB so that local people and visitors can continue to enjoy and learn more about Gower.

Our motto has long been 'Guarding Gower for all its worth'. This simple phrase sums up the passion of our volunteers who wish to conserve and celebrate Gower's unique environment to share with future generations by maintaining and sustaining the beauty of Gower.

Our Vision is that in order to function ever more effectively, the Gower Society wishes to seek out additional and expanded ways of presenting itself to the general public, together with all the positive work that it does, in order that it becomes much better known to a wider audience than at present. In this manner, it can help itself to attract more support for its many valuable activities.

A number of core values or 'ways of working' have been identified through consultation which has informed us how the Society will deliver its objectives.

1. Communication – improving communication and promoting understanding. This includes providing clear information in a range of formats and media to help people find out more about Gower and its special qualities as well as the work of the Society.
2. Engagement – involving people in the work of the Society, whether they are local or visitors, members or non members. In doing so we will continue to promote social inclusion alongside a particular focus of engaging with young people.
3. Resilience – helping to protect Gower so it is safeguarded for present and future generations.

Priority Objectives

The strategy has been developed through an iterative and inclusive process involving the Trustees and representatives drawn from our membership and the Gower Society Youth Action Group. External, independent support was obtained to ensure impartiality and provide a 'critical friend' approach. This included a questionnaire and two workshops held in March 2018 at which the strategic priorities were discussed. Following these workshops, a plan was drafted and considered by a sub group for approval by the Board.

We will focus on 5 key areas:

1. To invest in our IT infrastructure, digital platforms and social media – our use of new technology and social media is currently limited. We wish to expand our use of IT, digital platforms and social media to communicate our work and engage with our members and others.
2. To gain a better understanding of the needs of our members – we will implement new ways of gathering feedback from existing and potential new members.
3. To increase the number of members and encourage the younger generation to become members, including raising our profile in the community and the community's awareness of our good work.
4. To work in partnership for the common good of Gower – working with other voluntary and community groups or organisation and/or public sector organisations.
5. Succession planning – to ensure a continually effective and diverse Board, we need to plan. By looking ahead, we can plan when new people will need to be brought in to replace departing Trustees. In doing so we aim to extend the diversity of our Trustees in terms of age and ethnicity whilst maintaining the gains we have made on gender inclusion.

Delivering and Monitoring

Our plan will be delivered via our committee structure supported by a detailed operational plan. We will monitor our plan via report to our Board from each of the committee leads. Updates on progress will be given at each Annual General Meeting.

Inclusion

We have referred to the November 2017 research and report commissioned by Office for Civil Society and the Charity Commission and delivered by a consortium led by Cass Business School and the Cranfield Trust on inclusivity in Charities. Regarding gender, we have three female Trustees out of eight, and this compares reasonably favourably to report findings that nationally men outnumber women two to one. We are concerned about the age profile of our Trustees and committee members which are predominantly over 70 years old and our wish to change this is reflected in our objectives.

If you have any feedback, would like to be a member or would like to get involved in another way, please:

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Email us: contact@thegowersociety.org.uk