

Minutes of Meeting

9 December 2025

1 Welcome and Introductions

Chair: Colin Everett (CE)

2 Attendance and Apologies:

Councillors: Maggie Kirk (MK), Ian Button (IB), Lesley-Anne Nolan (LAN), Jo Scott (JS)

Clerk: Judy Chappell (JC)

RFO: Francis Morgan (FM)

Public: 3 attendees in person

Apologies for absence: None

3 Declarations of interests: None

4 Minutes:

4.1 Resolved to approve and sign the Minutes of the RCC meeting of Wednesday 8 October 2025 as a correct record.

5 Strategic Priorities

Updates on strategic priorities

5.1.1a Biodiversity – the Draft Section 6 Biodiversity report was presented by MK as author. The members were grateful for the work and satisfied that the report was both comprehensive and compliant. Action: (1) the report was approved with authority given to MK and CE to make minor editorial changes such as inclusion of links and images as needed prior to the publication deadline of 31/12/25 and (2)

5.1.1b Biodiversity – the Council required a Biodiversity Officer to add capacity to the team given its responsibilities. Francis Morgan (RFO) had volunteered for the role, for which members were grateful. CE requested that a role description be prepared. Action: (1) FM appointed as Biodiversity Officer and (2) MK to produce a short description for the Biodiversity Officer role.

5.1.2 South Gower Flooding and Council Works – CE gave a verbal report on ongoing liaison with the City and County of Swansea on preventative and responsive

highways work to mitigate road flooding. He was awaiting a fuller report, and was pressing for a site visit to explore longer-term solutions for the local road network. The members discussed the reporting facility to alert CCS when floods occurred. Action: (1) that the report be noted and a further report be made and (2) MK to add the link on website to report flooding via CCS portal.

5.1.3 Special Outdoor Events and City and Council of Swansea Strategy –CE gave a verbal report on the consultation event held by the CCS as part of the review of their strategy for outdoor special outdoor events. He had contributed on behalf of local communities alongside other local organisations including tourism operators. Action: that the report be noted.

5.1.4 Emergency Planning – CE gave a verbal report to follow the successful November workshop held in partnership with the CCS Emergency Planning Team. The next step, in the new year, would be to identify individuals who might lead on thematic within the plan, and then involve neighbouring councils. Action: that the report be noted.

5.1.5 Community Well-being – MK made the proposal to carry out a community survey to identify needs/interest in the four proposed basic First Aid skills workshops. Action: (1) the survey be approved and (2) the Council bear the costs of hosting the events.

5.1.6 Road Safety – JS shared ideas for advisory road signs to improve road safety. These could be included in the workstream on road safety, which needed to be re-opened. Action: that the workstream on road safety be reopened and advisory road signage be included.

5.2 Current Issues

Footpaths and Rights of Way *(to be a standing item for Council meetings)*

5.2.1 Repair of Lower Beach Access Path - CE reported that the repairs were due to be completed in mid-January subject to weather conditions. CCS had budget provision, and was appointing a contractor. Other parts of the footpath were still due repair. Action: that the report be noted and welcomed.

5.2.1a Mewslade Pathway – it was reported that work scheduled by CCS was to start once weather conditions improved. Action: that the report be noted.

5.2.1b Pitton Sink Hole – it was reported that a sink hole had appeared close to the Welsh Water access road. CCS and Welsh Water had responded promptly and a repair had been completed. Action: that the report be noted.

5.2.2 [Grazing on Rhossili Cliffs](#) – JS presented a detailed report on Rhossili Commons and Common Rights. The proposal for RCC to facilitate a public meeting of the respective bodies with roles and responsibilities was made, with the aim of forming a sustainable management plan for the grazing of animals on the cliffs that allows safe public access and freedom of movement of the people that use the cliffs for recreation. It was proposed that the meeting be held in public. Action: that the proposal for a meeting be approved, and the report presented be published.

6 Planning

6.1.1 Revision of Planning Protocol to accommodate the Biodiversity and Environmental Impact Planning Checklist – the updated protocol was presented for approval, incorporating the biodiversity and environmental impact planning checklist. Action: that the updated version be approved.

6.1.2 Biodiversity and Environmental Impact Planning Checklist – the final version of the checklist was presented. Action: that the checklist be adopted and used for the review of current and future planning applications.

6.1.3 Current Planning Applications – there were no comments to submit on current planning applications. Action: none

6.1.4 Retrospective Approval of Comments Submitted to the Planning Authority: Comments for Planning Application 2025/2006/FUL Sunnyside had been submitted by the due deadline. Action: that the comments be retrospectively approved.

7 Governance and Finance

7.1 Community Boundary Review – Ce reported on (1) the decision of Welsh Government to proceed with the merger of community councils on South Gower (2) the proposal to convene a meeting of the four relevant community councils, with the City and County of Swansea, to plan ahead for transition to the new council and (3) representations to be made Welsh Government for a full explanation for the rationale for the merger to be continued. Action: that the proposals be approved.

7.2 Finance (Reports of RFO)

7.2.1 Receive the Financial Report for December 2025 –additional sponsorship for magazine projected at £818.00. Projected balance at year-end £3.5k which will be transferred to 2026/27. Action: report noted and approved.

7.2.2 Retrospective Council approval given to following payments and actions:

7.2.2a £10.00 on 22/10/25 for use of Village Hall for workshop on 17th November 2025 – pre-approved by Chair and Clerk. Action: approved.

7.2.2b £16 on 1st December - Jamie King - RHOSS-ORG-06 - RCC Website Domain Name - 01/12/2025 to 30/11/2026 – pre-approved by Chair and Clerk. Action: approved.

7.2.2c £110 on 1st December - Jamie King - RHOSS-ORG-06 - RCC Website Domain Name - 01/12/2025 to 30/11/2026– pre-approved by Chair and Clerk. Action: approved

7.2.2d Payment for re-printing small quantity of copies of the Annual Magazine (and the rationale for selecting the vendor – Print Partnership) at a cost no greater than £800 approved. Action: approved.

7.2.3 Council noted and approved the receipt of payments totalling £340 for adverts in or Sponsorship of the Annual Magazine with more receipts to follow.

7.2.4 Follow up on costs of mowing of village green - outstanding

7.2.4 Budget and Precept for 2026/27 – the draft was presented with amendments made at the meeting. The precept to remain unchanged with reserves to be drawn upon to meet the projected deficit. Action: annual budget approved with amendments.

8 Administration

8.1 Annual Community Magazine – it was reported the magazine was well-received, and thanks were given to the production team. Several learning points: any event advertising for 2026 should be carefully considered against the print/delivery deadline; start production earlier in 2026; some addresses impossible to deliver owing to no post-boxes/difficult access; update this year's map as there were more addresses than anticipated; update the print run; contributors brief to be further clarified so that copy and image files arrive in correct format; improve handling of copy once received.. Action: report noted.

8.2 Local Recycling Event – arrangements for planning the event for February 2026 reported. Action: noted .

8.3 Ongoing IT Support – no actions to report.

8.4 Gower Management Plan – RCC to attend the planned Gower National Landscape event on its future planning in January. Councillors to book places. Action: noted.

8.5 Correspondence

8.5.1 Knelston School – Safeguarding Software – IB reported that the school had made a request for repeat funding for software. The original funding granted had been a one-off, and the Council did not have the financial capacity to be a grant-giver. However, the school could use the planned £100 donation for 2026/27 for this purpose, alongside contributions from other neighbouring community councils, if it so wished. Action: that the request be declined on the above terms.

8.5.2 National Trust Replacement Benches – CE gave a verbal report on the planned replacement of coastal benches. Action: report noted.

8.5.3 Bus Shelter Replacement – CE gave a verbal report on the initial contact made with CCS on an imaginative and bespoke solution to the replacement of the tired bus terminus bus stop. Action: report noted.

8.6 Schedule of Meetings 2026 – JC reported that meeting dates had not yet been set for 2026. Action: that a schedule of dates be set for 2026 and reported to the next meeting.

9 Updates from RCC Representatives

9.1 Gower Community Council Forum: no meeting had been held in the interim.

9.2 One Voice Wales – Swansea Area Committee: no meeting had been held in the interim.

9.3 One Voice Wales – Nature Hub – MK reported that an informative workshop had been held on Section 6 reporting.

9.4 Rhossili Community Hwb Steering Group – no meeting had been held in the interim.

9.5 Swansea Local Nature Partnership – no report given.

9.6 Rhossili Bunkhouse & Village Hall Trustees – no report given.

9.7 Knelston School – IB gave a verbal update on the work of the School Governing Body.

9.8 National Trust – no report given.

9.9 Gower Commoners Association – no report given.

9.10 The Gower Society – no report given.

5.2.2 Report: Grazing on Rhossili Cliffs

Briefing Paper - Rhossili Commons

Presented by Jo Scott at RCC Council Meeting 28 January 2026

Most people walking on Rhossili Down or along The Cliffs never stop to think that this vast open landscape is not simply public land. It is Common Land, governed by an ancient system of

shared rights and mutual duties that link local farms, the National Trust as the landowner and the community.

In Rhossili the main Common is Rhossili Down (CL1) and The Cliffs as far as Mewslade, and Harding's Down. Smaller areas such as Pilton Green and Pitton Cross are also registered as Commons. Until a few years ago, Pilton Green and Pitton Cross were grazed together but the graziers stopped after repeated incidents of traffic striking their horses. Pitton Cross is now fenced, and a farmer continues to graze sheep on it but Pilton Green has to be managed by the National Trust because it is unsafe for grazing livestock. (There aren't supposed to be fences around Commons but the safety of animals comes first.)

How Common Rights Work

A Right of Common is a traditional legal entitlement attached to certain specific parcels of farmland. It may include grazing livestock (pasture), taking turf and peat (turbary) collecting wood for fencing or fuel (estover), or taking stone for walls or tracks.

Each right is defined by the acreage of relevant fields which then limits the number of animals that may graze — known as the stintage. Typically, five sheep equal one cow or horse per half-acre of eligible land.

These rights are listed in the official Register of Commons, held by the City and County of Swansea. Unfortunately, the register hasn't been updated since 1965, so many of the farms listed have long since changed hands or been divided. The Council's Registration Officer has begun the painstaking job of creating a digital record and matching it with the Land Registry to bring the register up to date. Every field has a unique number and ownership of them is individually recorded at The Land Registry; thus, the true ownership and related Rights of Common can be determined.

Who Holds Rights Locally?

Most Commons throughout the country have local associations who can agree rules for management and operation in conjunction with the landowners. There are 5 such owners of Commons in Gower. Rhossili is represented on the Gower Commoners' Association by Nicola Rees and Jo Scott. Not all Commoners remain members — some have not paid subscriptions for many years. Membership helps with legal problems that may arise from time to time and Peter Lanfear, the Chair of Gower Commons Association is recognized as one of the most knowledgeable and experienced experts across England and Wales.

The National Trust and the Rules of the Common

The National Trust owns both Rhossili Down and The Cliffs, which are designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and part of a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The Cliffs are also a National Nature Reserve.

Because of these designations, strict conditions apply:

- No secondary feeding (hay or concentrates) except during severe weather for animal welfare.
- Temporary restriction of grazing if land becomes damaged.
- No entire stallions or bulls roaming freely where bridle paths cross the Common, but only if they have applied, as landowner, for an Order under the terms of the 1908 Animals Act, via the Welsh Government.

If animals are fed concentrates such as pony nuts or hay in feeders, except in emergencies like severe snow, then technically they are no longer “grazing” animals but are “kept” animals and not entitled to use Grazing Rights. It is the responsibility of the National Trust to enforce conditions directly. The condition of the SSSI and NNR also comes under the oversight of Natural Resources Wales and ultimately the Senedd government.

Grazing and Conservation in Tension

Grazing plays a vital role in maintaining the rich mix of grasses and wildflowers that make the cliffs and Downs ecologically valuable. Yet grazing is risky here. Dog attacks have become common, especially with the surge in visitor numbers in recent years. Some graziers have withdrawn livestock altogether after losing animals and some have also been lost by falling over the cliff edges, six this year.

As the number of graziers has fallen, vegetation has changed. Gorse, bramble and ragwort — once kept in check by stock — have spread fast. Ragwort is toxic to horses and to a lesser extent, cattle and sheep and spreads by wind-borne seed. Local residents, especially equine-keepers have described “plague levels” of ragwort in 2023, threatening neighbouring fields.

The National Trust Ranger and volunteers worked hard to clear areas near Mew Slade, and local families have joined these efforts with machinery and manual labour. Still, next year’s growth is already showing through. Cutting the plant will not kill it and pulling it out must achieve total removal of all the roots to make sure it doesn’t regrow.

Sheep grazing this summer has helped suppress the weed but there is still some beginning to grow again.

Opinion: Time for a New Approach

It is encouraging that the National Trust agreed to remove the stallion from the Cliffs, and one hopes it will not simply be moved elsewhere on Gower. But the wider problem remains. Around 600,000 visitors now walk these cliffs each year — an extraordinary figure for a small community and a fragile site.

Livestock deaths, visitor injuries, and official notices from the Health and Safety Executive underline that unmanaged grazing and heavy tourism are incompatible. Yet the landscape owes its beauty and its SSSI status to centuries of controlled grazing.

A National Trust- and Natural Resources Wales- led plan — with support of the local Rhossili community, local graziers and other interested parties working together — could protect both the landscape and the livelihoods that depend on it.

PROPOSAL:

I propose that a public meeting is convened, hosted by RCC with invitations sent out to all relevant groups and individuals, with the aim of beginning the process of forming a sustainable management plan for the grazing of animals on the cliffs, (and also protecting the SSSI, the NNR and SAC) that also allows safe public access and freedom of movement for the hundreds of

thousand visitors that use the cliffs for recreation. I envisage that RCC has a role in assisting the development of The Plan, but is NOT directly involved in its operation.

Such a plan would require co-operation and support from diverse groups but I believe it is possible to achieve. For instance, prior to 2019, when the present herds of cobs arrived on the cliffs grazing continuously since then, the grazing was always restricted to late October through to March, thus allowing the flowers, grasses etc. to flourish and seed, but also avoiding the pressure from the greatest number of visitors during Spring and Summer. The added bonus is better feed for grazing, thus there would be no need to augment with concentrated foods. If fewer animals are allowed to graze, then other methods of maintaining habitats will have to be organized and carried out.