

Sustainability in the Early Years
ECEY6005

Swansea Valley Trail

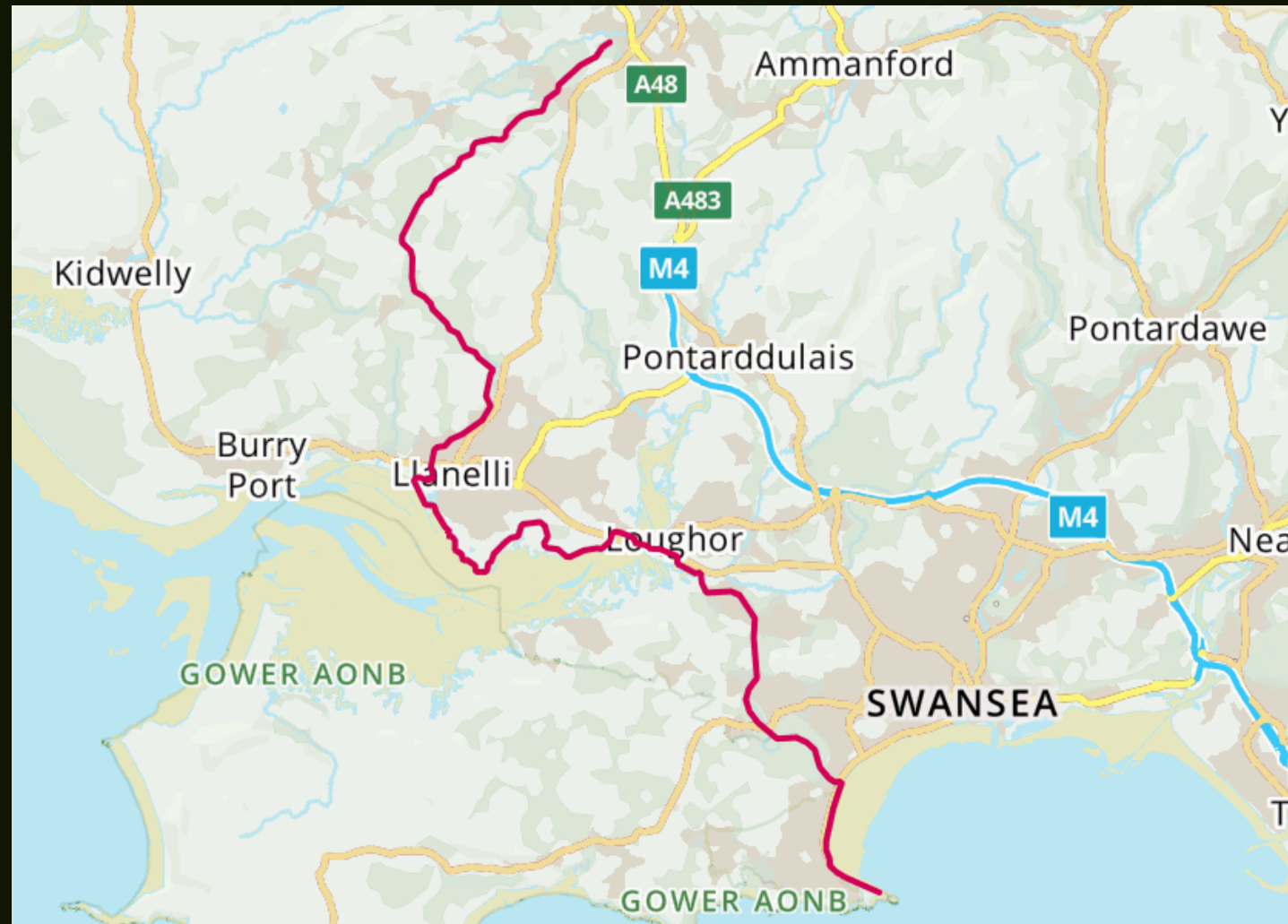
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Student Number – 2319662



Discover

The area I have chosen for the John Muir Award is the Swansea Valley Trail. I selected this location because I love walking along this path with family and friends, often joined by my dogs, who particularly enjoy exploring the natural surroundings. The trail provides a peaceful and calm environment, offering a valuable opportunity to experience nature away from the noise and demands of everyday life. A key feature of the setting is the sound of the trickling waterfall, along with flowing water, birdsong, and rustling vegetation, all of which contribute to a sensory-rich and tranquil atmosphere. This combination of natural sounds and scenic woodland scenery enhances feelings of relaxation and connection with the environment. Overall, the Swansea Valley Trail offers an accessible and diverse natural space that supports exploration, reflection, and an appreciation of local biodiversity, making it a suitable location for completing the John Muir Award.

Discover



The Swansea Valley Trail takes visitors on a journey through the area's rich industrial heritage and regenerated landscape. Beginning at Swansea Waterfront near the Sail Bridge, the trail follows the River Tawe, passing landmarks such as the Liberty Stadium, historic brick warehouses, and the remains of the former copperworks. The route then crosses to the western side of the river, continuing through Glais and across the Afon Tawe Bridge before reaching Coed Gwilym Park, which is home to Clydach Heritage Centre and provides an ideal location for rest and recreation. The trail continues alongside the canal to Pontardawe before finishing on the eastern side of the valley, where visitors are rewarded with panoramic views of the Brecon Beacons National Park. Overall, the trail combines historical, cultural, and natural features, offering opportunities to explore the region's industrial past while appreciating its environmental regeneration and scenic beauty.

Poem



My Journey Through the Swansea Valley Trail
Along the winding woodland trail,
Where whispered breezes tell a tale,
The river flowed with gentle grace,
A peaceful, calm and quiet place.
The waterfall's soft, soothing song
Accompanied my walk along.
Its flowing waters, clear and bright,
Filled me with a sense of light.
Tall ash trees reached towards the sky,
As birds and butterflies passed by.
Wildflowers bloomed with vibrant hue,
Their beauty shining fresh with dew.
Queen Anne's lace stood proud and fair,
Providing food with gentle care.
For bees and butterflies to feed,
Supporting every living need.
Each step revealed the world anew,
Where nature's colours came into view.
The rustling leaves, the songs of birds,
Spoke louder than a thousand words.
This trail has taught me to admire
The beauty that we should inspire
To protect, conserve, and understand
The precious gifts of nature's hand.
The John Muir Award has helped me see
How important our role can be.
To care for woodlands, streams, and skies,
So future generations realise
That every flower, tree, and stream,
Is part of nature's greater dream.
The Swansea Valley will remain
A place of peace, again and again.



Explore

Queen Anne's lace, also known as wild carrot, is a native wildflower that supports a wide range of wildlife. Its flat flower heads provide nectar and pollen for bees, hoverflies, butterflies, moths, beetles, and solitary wasps, while also serving as a food source for the caterpillars of several butterfly and moth species. After flowering, its seeds provide food for birds, and the dried stems offer shelter for insects during winter. Queen Anne's lace also improves biodiversity by supporting insects, birds, and small mammals, while its deep taproot helps loosen compacted soil, improve water infiltration, and recycle nutrients. It grows best in sunny, well-drained areas such as wildflower meadows, field margins, woodland edges, and open clearings, where it attracts pollinators that benefit surrounding plants. However, it closely resembles the poisonous Hemlock, so it should not be foraged unless it has been correctly identified. Overall, Queen Anne's lace is an important native wildflower that plays a valuable role in supporting pollinators, improving biodiversity, and maintaining healthy ecosystems.





Explore



The Ash Tree is one of the UK's most important native trees due to its significant contribution to biodiversity and healthy woodland ecosystems. It provides food, shelter, and breeding habitats for a wide range of wildlife, including insects, birds, bats, squirrels, fungi, and woodland plants. Ash trees play an important environmental role by absorbing carbon dioxide, releasing oxygen, improving air quality, enriching the soil as their leaves decompose, and reducing soil erosion and flooding through their extensive root systems. Their relatively open canopy allows sunlight to reach the woodland floor, encouraging the growth of native wildflowers and increasing biodiversity. However, ash trees are currently under threat from ash dieback, a fungal disease that has caused widespread decline across the UK and Europe, highlighting the importance of conserving healthy ash populations. Within areas such as the Swansea Valley Trail, mature ash trees are particularly valuable as they support diverse habitats, enhance ecosystem health, and contribute to the long-term sustainability of the woodland environment.

Ash Trees support wildlife by providing food, shelter, and nesting habitats for numerous insects and birds. They attract insects such as hoverflies, ladybirds, beetles, aphids, and the caterpillars of several moth species, which are an important food source for birds and bats. Bird species including great spotted woodpeckers, nuthatches, blue tits, great tits, bullfinches, robins, blackbirds, and treecreepers use ash trees for nesting, feeding, and protection.

Explore

Bees are important pollinating insects that play a vital role in maintaining biodiversity and supporting food production. There are over 20,000 species worldwide and more than 270 species in the UK, including honey bees, bumblebees, and many solitary bees. Bees feed on nectar for energy and collect pollen to feed their young, and as they move between flowers they transfer pollen, enabling plants to reproduce. This process supports the growth of wildflowers, crops, fruits, and vegetables, which in turn provides food and habitat for other wildlife. Bees such as the Honey bee and Bumblebee are especially important, with honey bees known for their “waggle dance” communication and bumblebees able to fly in cooler weather. Most bees are solitary rather than living in colonies, and all species are essential for healthy ecosystems.

The Common privet flower is ecologically important as it provides a rich nectar source for pollinators, particularly bees such as the Honey bee and Bumblebee. Flowering in early to mid-summer, it supports pollination processes that enable plant reproduction and contribute to wider ecosystem stability and biodiversity. By sustaining key pollinating species, privet indirectly supports the production of seeds, fruits, and vegetation that underpin food chains in woodland and hedgerow habitats. Additionally, privet hedges offer shelter and habitat for invertebrates and birds, further enhancing their environmental value within managed and semi-natural landscapes.

Look close – the bee is collecting nectar.



Explore



The litter on this path is disgusting. It is everywhere.
No bins on the entire path.



Milo likes to collect at least 3 plastic bottles a day for our recycling bag.

Litter has a significant negative impact on the environment and wildlife, contributing to habitat degradation and biodiversity loss. Discarded waste, particularly plastics and non-biodegradable materials, can persist in natural environments for long periods, polluting soil and waterways and disrupting ecological processes. Wildlife is often directly affected, as animals may ingest litter or become entangled in it, leading to injury, starvation, or death. For example, plastic waste can be mistaken for food by birds and aquatic species, while sharp or hazardous materials can cause physical harm. In addition, litter can reduce the aesthetic and recreational value of natural areas, discouraging public engagement with green spaces and weakening conservation efforts. Overall, littering undermines ecosystem health and poses a serious threat to both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife.

David Attenborough

David Attenborough is a British broadcaster, natural historian, and environmental advocate who has spent more than seven decades educating people about wildlife, biodiversity, and the importance of protecting the natural world. Through his documentaries, books, and public campaigns, he has inspired millions of people to appreciate nature and understand the impact that human activities have on the environment.



He has raised global awareness by presenting landmark wildlife documentaries, including Planet Earth, Blue Planet, and Our Planet. These programmes showcase the beauty and diversity of ecosystems while highlighting threats such as climate change, deforestation, plastic pollution, and habitat loss. By making complex environmental issues accessible, they have helped increase public understanding and concern. His work has inspired individuals, communities, governments, and organisations to support conservation projects. By showing the importance of protecting habitats and endangered species, he has encouraged greater interest in wildlife conservation and sustainable living. His documentaries are widely used in schools and early years settings to encourage children to explore nature, care for living things, and develop an understanding of sustainability. They support learning through observation, discussion, and outdoor activities.

A key message throughout his work is that biodiversity, the variety of life on Earth, is essential for healthy ecosystems. He explains that protecting forests, oceans, wetlands, and wildlife benefits both nature and people by supporting clean air, clean water, food production, and climate regulation.

David Attenborough's work supports the principles of sustainability because it encourages respect for the natural environment and highlights the importance of protecting resources for future generations. In early years education, practitioners can use age-appropriate clips or stories inspired by his work to help children:

- Develop curiosity about plants, animals, and habitats.
- Learn how to care for wildlife and the environment.
- Understand simple sustainable practices such as recycling, reducing waste, and planting flowers for pollinators.
- Build empathy and a sense of responsibility for the natural world.

While David Attenborough has had an enormous influence on environmental awareness, lasting environmental change depends on more than raising awareness alone. Protecting biodiversity and tackling climate change also require action by governments, businesses, communities, and individuals. His work is therefore best understood as an important catalyst that inspires people to learn about and support environmental conservation, rather than as a solution on its own.

Conserve

To conserve this area, I have implemented a short-term measure by placing litter bags along the trail to reduce visible waste and encourage responsible disposal. In addition, I have contacted Swansea Council to express my concerns regarding litter management and environmental protection along the site. I am hopeful that this communication will be taken into consideration and result in further action to improve waste management and protect the local environment.

Send

To

chiefexecutive@swansea.gov.uk

Rubbish Bins needed at Swansea Valley Trail

Draft saved at 14:34

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to request the installation of additional litter bins along the Swansea Valley Trail. I regularly use this trail for walking with family and friends, and I have noticed that although it is a popular and well-used natural space, there are limited facilities for the disposal of waste.

The lack of bins can contribute to litter being left along the path, which negatively affects the appearance of the area and poses a risk to local wildlife. Litter can harm animals through ingestion or entanglement and can also damage the natural environment that makes the trail such an enjoyable and valuable community space.

By providing more bins at key points along the route, particularly near entrances, rest areas, and viewpoints, the council could help reduce littering and encourage responsible waste disposal. This would improve the cleanliness of the trail, protect local biodiversity, and enhance the experience for all visitors.

I believe that maintaining the natural beauty of the Swansea Valley Trail is important for both environmental and community wellbeing, and I hope the council will consider this request seriously.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your response.

Yours faithfully,

Chloe Jones