

Council, Tuesday 12 September 2006

Opposition Policy Item

## A Cleaner, Greener and Safer Welsh Harp

The Welsh Harp (Brent Reservoir) is a regional wetland open space designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Site of Metropolitan Importance and a Local Nature Reserve because of its major conservation status as a wintering and nesting site for wildfowl.

The reservoir is owned by British Waterways. The land habitats around the reservoir, shared between Barnet and Brent Councils, support a wide variety of species and are enjoyed by many residents. The site is scientifically important because of the high numbers of birds - including one of the largest breeding colonies of Great Crested Grebes in the country – and the diversity of it's wetland and marginal plants.

Unfortunately, over recent years the Welsh Harp has become a magnet for anti-social behaviour. This summer has been no different.

A rave took place at the Welsh Harp on Saturday 29 and Sunday 30 July. The event was highly organised with a website promoting the rave, the sale of food and drink, and the organisers wheeling speakers and music equipment on trolleys into the Welsh Harp at 9pm on Saturday evening. Access was via Wood Lane into both Brent and Barnet Council's areas of the Welsh Harp, and Barnet residents suffered very loud music all night. Up to 1,000 people were present at the rave that left behind the detritus of urination, defecation, litter, fires, and drug dealing and using.

During the rave, residents contacted Barnet's out-of hours service. Unfortunately the service refused to take action and told residents to phone the police. However, the police refuse to take action unless contacted by Barnet Council. Brent Council also refused to take action. The public outcry forced the councils and police to take action against a subsequent planned rave.

The rave in late July was the latest in a string of raves and anti-social behaviour including fires and vandalism in the Welsh Harp. Worst of all, there has been a tragic death of a man swimming in the reservoir during the hot summer. Although there are signs warning visitors not to swim, many visitors either ignore the signs or don't speak English as a first language so the signs do not help. The Council no longer undertakes patrols of the Welsh Harp.

Council accepts responsibility for taking a community leadership role in preserving and enhancing the Welsh Harp. Council asks the Cabinet to work in partnership with Brent Council and the police to combat the problems in the Welsh Harp.