

Decisions of the Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee

Held as an online meeting on Wednesday 23rd November 2022 at 7.00 pm

Members Present (in remote attendance):

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| Councillor Anne Clarke (Chair) | London Borough of Barnet |
| Councillor Parvez Ahmed | London Borough of Brent |
| Councillor Mary Mitchell | London Borough of Brent |
| Councillor Rishikesh Chakraborty | London Borough of Barnet |
| Councillor Liz Dixon | London Borough of Brent |
| Councillor Saqib Butt | London Borough of Brent |
| Doug Alexander | Environment Agency |
| Lewis Elmes | Environment Agency |
| Neil Earnshaw | Canal and River Trust |
| Suzanne Morpurgo | Brent Parks Forum |
| John Shepherd | Welsh Harp Sailing Association |
| Manfred Starkl | Welsh Harp Sailing Association |
| Judy Shepherd | West Hendon Community Forum |
| Daniela | Friends of the Welsh Harp |
| Livia Forte | Friends of the Welsh Harp |
| Ben Watt | Cool Oak Group |
| Liz Hall | West Hendon Residents Association |
| Dianne Murphy | London Wildlife Trust |
| Martin Francis | Member of the public |
| Leila Taheri | Friends of the Welsh Harp |
| Philip Atkinson | Phoenix Canoe Club |
| Derrick Chung | West Hendon Residents Association |

1. MINUTES

AGREED that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 27th July 2022 be approved as a correct record.

2. ABSENCE OF MEMBERS

Apologies for absence received from Councillor Ernest Ambe and Councillor Andrea Bilbow.

3. DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND NON PECUNIARY INTERESTS

None.

4. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER (IF ANY)

None.

5. LONDON BOROUGH OF BARNET WELSH HARP UPDATE

Cassie Bridger (Assistant Director of Greenspaces & Leisure, Barnet Council) introduced the report providing an update relating to on-going site management issues affecting Welsh Harp Reservoir.

Ms Bridger noted in the report the reference regarding the services Parkguard provided to Barnet Council which ceased on 30th September of this year with the team in the process of exploring future options to support the administrations future model of park rangers. A report will be taken in early 2023 to the Environment & Climate Change Committee with more information to follow.

There have been no reported illegal encampments during the previous quarters and the Councils Greenspaces and Leisure Team continue to work closely with the Barnet Community Safety Team, the Local Police and other partners to identify and remove encampments when notified.

Ms Bridger noted that there has been quite significant progress on the West Hendon master plan since the last meeting and in relation to procurement process which is currently live.

She also informed that in partnership with the Landscape Institute the Council has been delivering a two-stage design competition to secure a multi-disciplinary design team. Stage 1 has been completed and evaluated receiving 19 entries and the Council is shortly due to announce the three successful design teams who will be move forward to Stage 2 of the competition process. A future update will come back to this meeting.

ACTION: MS BRIDGER/MR GUNYON

Barnet Council have also seen the introduction of a biodiversity manager who joined at the end of August and is currently working with an ecologist in the conservation department on the biodiversity action plan which will be in progress in the new year. Lewis Elmes from the Environment Agency offered assistance in relation to the biodiversity action plan once the work commences.

Cllr Mitchell asked about the opportunity for Barnet to reach out to Brent Council on their biodiversity work and if the priorities on this can be aligned. Ms Bridger informed that this is currently in its infancy stages of gathering evidence and the team will then commission a specialist service to engage with partners and stakeholders for engagement with lots of opportunities to make this successful. Leslie Williams advised that Brent does have a biodiversity action plan, however it is somewhat dated and much of the content has been incorporated in various planning strategies within Brent.

Leila Taheri asked if glyphosate will be reviewed within the biodiversity plan and Ms Bridger noted that there is a specific workstream looking at this with a number of different strategies which will crosscut against it.

6. LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT - WELSH HARP MANAGEMENT PLAN

Leslie Williams (Project Officer, Brent Council) presented a report outlining progress on the Brent Reservoir / Welsh Harp Management Plan since the last meeting of the Committee and during the 2022/23 year to date. The Management Plan is jointly managed by the three mainland-holding organisations: Brent Council, the London Borough of Barnet, and the Canal & River Trust.

He noted that the vision group includes the 3 main landowners as well as Thames 21, the London wildlife trust and The Greater London Authority and noted that progress is being made with a brief expected in early December and a public exhibition to be held in the spring. The Canal and River Trust will host the vision and a brief overview will be put on their website for the public's information.

Mr Williams informed that the work is continuing on the management plan with partners and the updated work is appended to the report which includes some of the main issues that affect the Welsh Harp.

Visits during the summer of 2021 and 2022 indicated that the previous work on the northern shore at the Welsh Harp Open Space has benefited a range of plants within the marshland vegetation along the edge of the reservoir while retaining a variety of trees on the shoreline landscape.

The Council is continuing to consider options for the Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre site. Officers from Commercial Property are also liaising with enquirers to understand their aspirations and requirements on a non-committal basis. Thames 21 are providing some limited services for the year of 2022/23 while discussions continue for a longer-term solution for the future of the Centre. Mr Williams thanked those who gave feedback and encouraged any further ideas to be sent to him.

The Healthy Walks scheme has continued with walkers following social distancing guidelines and also advised there have been some discussions with the Environment Agency on the trash screens as there has been evidence of unauthorised activity.

He informed of a pollution incident in the wooded marshland between the trading estate, whereby it is possible that cement dust has gone into the water. The dust is not organic, or oil based so the Environment Agency continue to monitor this.

Mr Williams also informed that the team are working on a walking route from Wembley Park to the Welsh Harp and back to provide a greener route. He is hoping for this to be signposted in the new year.

Brent are also currently looking at a longer term plan for the Staples Corner site with visibility of the Welsh Harp and access for visitors.

Doug Alexander confirmed that the field team clear the Priestly Way trash screen regularly however digging works are taking place outside the gate restricting access and if this is ongoing it could impact the collection of the trash screen and see a significant amount of waste and vegetation accumulating which could lead to increased amounts of litter reaching the Welsh Harp itself and also could lead to an increased risk of flooding. It was agreed that Doug would send the details of this to Mr Williams for his information and see if this can be resolved.

ACTION: DOUG ALEXANDER

Manfred Starkl informed that he and other members of the Welsh Harp Sailing Association usually help with the removal of the trees that are blocking the shaded areas and asked if those trees which are due to be cut down can be marked up with paint so the other groups on the Welsh Harp can agree to this also and save any confusion for the volunteers who will be carrying out this. Mr Williams noted that discussions on the trees continue with all the groups on the Welsh Harp on this issue.

John Shepherd asked about the Barnet side and that discussions had previously taken place with the developers at Brent Cross regarding silt traps and if there is any update on this to stop the silt coming down into the harp. Mr Williams advised that he was unaware of these discussions however was aware that the silt was coming from the Staples Corner area. The Chair advised that she had also raised this issue previously and that an update would come to the next meeting.

ACTION: MS BRIDGER

John Shepherd also asked about the strategic review of future planning for the harp and if this is still current. Mr Williams noted that an external consultant had collated the overall vision and that there had been some consultations in the earlier part of this year with wider discussions as the material available opens the public exhibition.

7. UPDATE FROM FRIENDS OF THE WELSH HARP

Leila Taheri presented the report continuing with its grassroots conservation and community activities.

Activities that have taken place since the last meeting in July include:

- Conservation events including 30 volunteers removing litter from the Eastern Marsh, Northern Marsh, and Cool Oak Lane with Barnet Council removing the collected items
- Conservation event in collaboration with two local synagogues including 40 volunteers removing litter from the Eastern Marsh, Northern Marsh, public bird hide, and Cool Oak Lane. Volunteers also started work at the 'rat feeding station', removing plastic mesh and preparing the compacted soil for future planting.
- The group also managed to secure pro bono creative time from an advertising agency to produce posters now around the Welsh Harp on bird feeding, and anti littering

Future activities were discussed as outlined in the report and the question was asked if any assistance can be offered with coppicing. Can CRT or the council assist with the coppicing? Phil Atkinson offered assistance from The Phoenix Canoe club along with Dianne Murphy of the London Wildlife Trust also offered to assist with the loaning of saws.

Leila Taheri also noted that Barnet Council had generously pledged to match the £1632 that has been crowd funded already and expressed her thanks to Barnet colleagues for this. She asked if the funding could also be matched from Brent. Cllr Mary Mitchell suggested making an application for funding from the 'Brent Together Towards Zero' grant which gives organisations up to £5000 for one off projects and initiatives to help tackle the climate and ecological emergency.

Ms Bridger thanked Leila and the wider Friends of Welsh harp on all their efforts to date and noted that despite the group already being put in touch with officers at Barnet she would pass on the details of the Biodiversity Officer, Harriet Duffield on future proofing the harp.

Ben Watts gave an update on the nesting islands which have arrived with the team helping to instigate this at a cost of £55k to the Canal River Trust via a third party. The next thing to look forward to is the scheduled replacement of the breeding rafts with 40 of these in a terrible state of disrepair. The first ten of these will be arriving soon in a staged replacement plan. He noted that the heavy siltation at various points of the Marsh will

affect the placing of the rafts until there is a longer term plan on the silt issue however lots of good work has been continuing and the vision is the next thing will be arriving soon.

Lewis Elmes informed that there was funding available within the Environment Agency for community groups that could possibly be sourced and agreed to see if this could be a possible source of funding for the harp in relation to the water testing and silt issue.

ACTION: LEWIS ELMES & DOUG ALEXANDER

Manfred Starkl gave an offer of assistance of boats in relation to the placing of the breeding rafts on the harp.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Suzanne Morpurgo from Brent Parks Forum gave an update in relation to the Education Centre and the continued partnership working with various community groups in Brent. A scheduled meeting will take place on 26th November with Thames 21 and these groups at the building and the outcome of this will be fed back at the next WHJCC with a view to make the education centre a strong hub of activity for the community.

Derrick Chung noted the Silkstream area by the industrial estate by the Halfords Bridge is in need of a clean up and asked for both the Environment Agency and Thames Water to look into this.

The Chair made the suggestion of an early Spring social event and asked for anyone with ideas to email them direct to her

9. ANY OTHER ITEMS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES ARE URGENT

NONE.

Date of next meeting: Thursday 16th March 2023

The meeting closed at 7.53 pm

Councillor Anne Clarke
Chair