

MINUTES OF THE WELSH HARP JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Held as an online meeting on Thursday 27 July 2023 at 6.00pm

Members Present (In Remote Attendance)

Councillor Krupa Sheth (Chair)	London Borough of Brent
Councillor Alan Schneiderman	London Borough of Barnet
Councillor Parvez Ahmed	London Borough of Brent
Cassie Bridger (Officer)	London Borough of Barnet
Leslie Williams (Officer)	London Borough of Brent
Adam Woods (Governance)	London Borough of Brent
Sian Palmer-Ferry	Canal & River Trust
Ben Watt	Cool Oak Group
Lewis Elmes	Environment Agency
Daniella Levene	Friends of Welsh Harp
Leila Taheri	Friends of Welsh Harp
Dale Langdale	Hendon Rifle Club
Dianne Murphy	London Wildlife Trust
Phil Atkinson	Phoenix Canoe Club
Diane Mitchell	Silver Park Jubilee Residents Association
Hannah Reid	Thames 21
John Shepherd	Welsh Harp Sailing Association
Manfred Starkl	Welsh Harp Sailing Association
Liz Hall	West Hendon Allotment Society

1. Election of Chair and Vice Chair 2023-24

As the meeting was the first of the 2023/24 municipal year, in accordance with the Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee Constitution, the Committee were required to appoint a Chair from Brent Council and a Vice Chair from Barnet Council. Consequently, Councillor Krupa Sheth from Brent Council was nominated by members and unanimously appointed to the position of Chair, and Councillor Alan Schneiderman from Barnet Council was nominated and unanimously appointed to the position of Vice Chair. As a Chair and Vice Chair had been appointed, Councillor Krupa Sheth was handed chairing responsibilities for the meeting and members turned to consider the substantive items on the agenda.

2. Apologies for Absence and Clarification of any Alternate Members

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Saqib Butt (London Borough of Brent), Councillor Mary Mitchell (London Borough of Brent), Councillor Rishikesh Chakraborty (London Borough of Barnet), Councillor Ernest Ambe Esq (London Borough of Barnet), Councillor Andrea Bilbow (London Borough of Barnet) and Derrick Chung (West Hendon Residents Association).

3. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations made.

4. Deputations (If Any)

None.

5. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

It was **AGREED** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 16 March 2023 be approved as an accurate record.

6. Matters Arising

None.

7. Management Plan (Barnet)

Cassie Bridger (Assistant Director, Greenspaces and Leisure, Barnet Council) presented the report, which provided an update to the Committee on the activities of Barnet Council during Quarter 1 (Apr-June 2023) in relation to the Welsh Harp and West Hendon Playing Fields.

In highlighting the key details of the report, the Committee were informed that Barnet Council had concluded a procurement exercise and awarded the contract to develop a new Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and a Local Nature Recovery Plan (LNRP had replaced Biodiversity Action Plans) to Land Use Consultants (LUC). Although Barnet Council were in the early stages of the commission, members were advised that there would be opportunities to contribute to the development of the documents through public consultations and engagement exercises.

Similarly, following the conclusion of the two stage design competition in partnership with the Landscape Institute, Barnet Council had awarded the contract to design the development of West Hendon Playing Fields to Ove Arup and Partners. Once again, the Committee were informed that a series of consultation and engagement activities, likely to be held in Autumn, would be delivered to help inform the design development for the playing fields.

Furthermore, members also noted that Barnet Council's Community Safety Team had been commissioned to deliver weekend patrols in a number of parks and open spaces over the summer period. It was explained that the patrols were intelligence led and based on known issues and reporting, with the Welsh Harp and West Hendon Playing Fields included in the patrol sites.

In welcoming further support from community groups regarding litter picking, Cassie Bridger detailed that contract litter pickers swept Welsh Harp during the week commencing 3 July 2023. In addition, the burnt-out car adjacent to the West Hendon Playing Fields was removed. It was stated that Barnet Council would arrange another contractor litter sweep in the winter when annual soft vegetation had subsided, and contact would be made with Natural England concerning dead hedging to mitigate bankside litter around the Silkstream trash screen.

To conclude their update, Cassie Bridger explained that, as members of the Thames21 Brent Catchment Partnership Steering Group, Barnet Council had approved the establishment of the following working groups:

- Data, Evidence and Monitoring
- Invasive Non-Native Species Control
- Eradication of Litter

Moreover, it was explained that Barnet Council would attend regular meetings with working group members, such as Thames Water, Canal and River Trust, the Environment Agency and other London Boroughs, to discuss how best to deal with the aforementioned issues across the Brent Catchment, all of which were relevant to the Welsh Harp.

Having thanked Cassie Bridger for the update, the Chair invited comments and contributions from Committee members, with questions and responses summarised below:

- Regarding the Silk Stream bridge, the Committee were informed that a decision had not been taken on the future of the bridge. However, Barratt London was exploring a lighter weight design along the same route which was hoped to be more sensitive to the Welsh Harp area. In response to a suggestion to re-route the bridge amid concerns that a lighter weight alternative in the same place would significantly damage the SSSI, Councillor Schneiderman recognised the concerns but explained that Barratt London had received planning permission to build the bridge in that specific location. Nevertheless, Councillor Schneiderman reassured members that the design would have to be jointly approved by stakeholders such as Natural England, the Environment Agency and the Canal & River Trust, and reiterated that the design would have to be reviewed before making a final decision.

- In response to an issue relating to the condition of the bird hide at the Welsh Harp, which was particularly impacted by litter, members were advised that the issue would be raised with colleagues at Barnet Council and options would be explored to reduce the impact of waste at the bird hide.

As no further issues were raised, the Committee **AGREED** to note the report.

8. Management Plan (Brent)

Leslie Williams (Project Officer, Parks Service, Brent Council) introduced a report that outlined the progress made regarding the Brent Reservoir and Welsh Harp Management Plan since the last Committee meeting and during 2023/24. The Committee noted that the Action Plan for the Management Plan, attached in Appendix A of the report, had undergone a format review which replaced the 'Red', 'Amber', 'Green' rating with a text description of the action to provide a more accurate and nuanced update.

In moving to the main part of the update, Leslie Williams detailed that a new Grounds Maintenance Contract was commencing with Continental Landscapes Ltd on 1 August 2023 for the operational works in Brent Council's parks and open spaces. The contract included the Welsh Harp Open Space, Neasden Recreation Ground and Silver Jubilee Park. Members were also informed that the Park Warden Service was now an in-house Council service.

The Committee were advised that previous work to manage the marshland on the shore of the Welsh Harp Open Space provided for a range of conservation, landscape and recreational needs while retaining a variety of trees within the marshland. However, shade was continuing to reduce the marshland vegetation on the southwestern shore of the reservoir alongside Neasden Recreation Ground. Thus, Brent Council was planning to review the trees on the marshland to mitigate against overshadowing.

Following the approval of the proposals for a Post 16 Skills Resource Centre for young people with special educational needs by Brent Council's Cabinet at their May 2023 meeting, the Committee were informed that the Centre would be located in the Welsh Harp and would provide horticulture, work experience and volunteering opportunities. In addition to its main purpose, there was also the potential for use at other times by third sector and community organisations, with Thames 21 continuing to provide some limited services at the existing Centre.

In thanking the volunteers who were vital in the delivery of the programme, an update was provided regarding the Healthy Walks Programme, with walks held at the Welsh Harp taking place on Thursdays from 10am to 1pm, meeting at the Welsh Harp Open Space end of Birchen Grove, Kingsbury NW9.

It was explained that signage had been installed on a new way-marked walking route between Wembley Park Station and the Welsh Harp (Welsh Harp Open Space at Birchen Grove). The route extended through a mix of quieter roads and green spaces including the Canal Feeder and River Brent at Quainton Street Open Space, Chalkhill Open Space, St David's Close Open Space and Chalkhill Park.

In concluding the update, Lewis Elmes (Environment Agency) provided further context to the update on pollution incidents occurring in the southern side of the Brent Reservoir SSSI. In response to an incident occurring in November 2022, a polluter had been

identified and contacted regarding potential prosecution. The source of the pollution had been blocked and the suspected polluter had spoken to Thames Water concerning their discharge system. Moreover, the polluter had agreed to 48 hour rolling monitoring and they were in the process of remapping their drainage system. Regarding the pollution itself, the discharge, said to be a white powder, had ceased and PH levels had dropped to normal levels. Whilst there was evidence of ongoing foreign sewage entering the water, in which Thames Water were actively being engaged on, it was not linked to the original incident.

In thanking Leslie Williams and Lewis Elmes for the update, the Chair welcomed questions from Committee members, with contributions summarised below:

- In response to a query on the progress of the marshland work, members were informed that no work had commenced since the last Committee meeting and local discussions needed to be held before progressing, although it was planned to eventually have trees approximately 30 metres apart.
- Regarding pollution incidents in the Welsh Harp, the Committee were advised that there were ongoing issues with misconnected properties that Thames Water was aware of, businesses had been educated on pollution in response to incidents in Mutton Brook, there were a number of projects to address pollution and invest in the sewage network in Wealdstone Brook, and a more serious issue connected to Thames Water assets was being addressed further downstream. The work of Clean Up River Brent was also detailed, who had created a novel, cost-effective way of monitoring pollution. Members were informed to contact Lewis Elmes if they wanted to learn more about Clean Up River Brent's work or wanted to get involved in the work.
- Committee members highlighted that the public were accessing the water at Brent Reservoir as they were not aware of the restrictions in place. In response, Sian Palmer-Ferry (Canal & River Trust) explained that internal conversations were occurring within the Canal & River Trust to provide greater clarity concerning access to the waters. Thus, there were plans to improve the Terms of Reference on the Canal & River Trust website and increase signage at the reservoir.
- In reiterating the number of people using the water at Welsh Harp, members called for more communication regarding pollution incidents. In response, the Committee were informed that it was not practical to notify the public about every incident. However, the Environmental Agency was meeting Thames Water weekly to receive progress updates on existing incidents and mitigations. In addition, the Environmental Agency had asked for more frequent public communications from Thames Water.
- Consultative Committee members offered their assistance with the removal of trees on the marshland.
- Regarding the impact that draining the reservoir would have on the marshland, members were informed that most of the marshland consisted of perennial's which could cope with the change. Although recognising the

minor impacts that the draining could have, it was explained that the seeds would remain in the soil and more rain was expected over the period of the draining.

With no further issues being raised, the Committee **AGREED** to note the update.

9. Update from the Canal & River Trust

Sian Palmer Ferry (Canal & River Trust) presented the update, which focussed on the Welsh Harp Joint Vision (the Vision) and the planned Winter works at Brent Reservoir. To begin, a one-page summary of the Vision was shared with members, which detailed its four key themes: environment, wellbeing, place and inclusion. Sian Palmer-Ferry explained that answers to frequently asked questions were being drafted to accompany the Vision, and welcomed emails from members if there were any further questions after the meeting.

The Committee were then informed about the planned Winter works which would ensure that essential maintenance of Brent Reservoir was completed. Included in the works was the draining of the Reservoir funded by the People's Postcode Lottery, which was said to take approximately four weeks, with members noting that refilling was anticipated to commence before the bird nesting season in March. The Committee heard that the next steps for the Canal & River Trust were to publish answers to frequently asked questions and start a crowdfunding campaign for £15,000 in order to fund the fish rescue and clean up, which was expected to start at the end of Summer.

Before finishing the update, Sian Palmer-Ferry explained that vacancies within the team at the Canal & River Trust had now been filled, with new additions in the roles of Community Roots Manager, Volunteer Leader and Area Operations Manager. It was hoped that these additions would increase both engagement with the community and the number of volunteering opportunities available.

Following the conclusion of their update, the Chair thanked Sian Palmer-Ferry for presenting the item and opened up the discussion to Committee members, with questions and responses summarised below:

- In response to a query on the impact that an unsuccessful crowdfunding attempt would have, members were advised that the fish rescue and clean-up had to occur. Thus, the Canal & River Trust would have to self-fund the operation which would impact other projects as the activities were not budgeted in the organisation's core delivery.
- In reiterating the importance that the public were aware of the maintenance works due to safety risks, officers from both Brent and Barnet councils offered support in publishing and distributing relevant information. Sian Palmer-Ferry welcomed support with the winter works and outlined that signage of the works would be widespread throughout water access points and engagement with schools, colleges and community groups was planned to ensure extensive knowledge of the planned works.
- Regarding crayfish in the Welsh Harp, members were advised that environmental scientists from the Canal & River would be informed of the concerns, who could explore the possibility of sampling crayfish in the Welsh Harp area.

- Sian Palmer-Ferry noted the worries raised regarding terrapins in the north side of the Welsh Harp.
- In response to concerns about community groups being named in Canal & River Trust press releases without sufficient communication with the relevant organisations, members were given an apology as Sian Palmer-Ferry believed that community organisations had been contacted regarding volunteering. It was explained that the new Volunteer Lead at the Canal & River Trust would foster closer relationships with community groups going forward.

Having thanked Sian Palmer-Ferry for the update, and with no further queries, the Committee **AGREED** to note the update.

10. Dates of Future Meetings

The Committee noted the following meeting dates of the Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee for the 2023/24 municipal year:

- Thursday 23 November 2023 at 6pm
- Thursday 14 March 2024 at 6pm

11. Any Other Urgent Business

On behalf of Silver Jubilee Park Residents Association, Diane Mitchell addressed the Committee concerning an ongoing issue regarding trees behind the bungalows in Kinloch Drive, which were the responsibility of Barnet Council but located near the border with Brent Council. It was explained that the trees were not being maintained in a proper manner and were impacting local residents. Despite contacting officers from Barnet Council there had been little progress on the matter and therefore an update was requested on the issue. In response, Cassie Bridger reassured Diane Mitchell that the issue would be investigated further and apologised for any delays in communications. As a next step, Cassie Bridger informed Diane Mitchell that contact would be made to clarify the full details of the issue, with the Chair stating that Barnet Council and Brent Council would work together to resolve the issue.

The meeting ended at 7:22pm.

Councillor Krupa Sheth
CHAIR