

Decisions of the Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee

27 July 2022

Held as an online meeting on Wednesday 27th July 2022 at 7.00 pm

Members Present (in remote attendance):

Councillor Anne Clarke (Chair)	London Borough of Barnet
Councillor Parvez Ahmed	London Borough of Brent
Councillor Mary Mitchell	London Borough of Brent
Councillor Andrea Bilbow	London Borough of Barnet
Councillor Ernest Ambe	London Borough of Barnet
Councillor Rishikesh Chakraborty	London Borough of Barnet
Councillor Liz Dixon	London Borough of Brent
Councillor Saqib Butt	London Borough of Brent
Neal Hider	Environment Agency
Neil Earnshaw	Canal and River Trust
Suzanne	Brent Parks Forum
John Shepherd	Welsh Harp Sailing Association
Manfred Starkl	Welsh Harp Sailing Association
Judy Shepherd	West Hendon Community Forum
Andrew Haynes	Welsh Harp Conservation Group
Leo Batten	Welsh Harp Conversation Group
Ben Watt	Cool Oak Group
Liz Hall	West Hendon Residents Association
Dale Langdale	Hendon Rifle Club
Martin Francis	Member of the public
Freda Raingold	Silver Park Jubilee Residents Association
Leila Taheri	Friends of the Welsh Harp
David Stevens	Member of the public
Philip Atkinson	Phoenix Canoe Club

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10th March 2022 be agreed as a correct record.

2. ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR 2022/23

Corinna Demetriou asked the group to nominate a new Chair and Vice and Vice Chair for the year 2022/23. Cllr Parvez Ahmed nominated Cllr Anne Clarke to become the Chair of the Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee, this was seconded by Cllr Ernest Ambe. Cllr Parvez Ahmed nominated Cllr Mary Mitchell to become Vice Chair of the Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee. This was seconded by Cllr Clarke.

It was agreed that Cllr Anne Clarke is the Chair of the Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee and that that Cllr Mary Mitchell is the Vice Chair.

3. ABSENCE OF MEMBERS

There were no apologies for absence received.

4. DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND NON PECUNIARY INTERESTS

None.

5. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER (IF ANY)

None.

6. LONDON BOROUGH OF BARNET WELSH HARP UPDATE

Matthew Gunyon (Greenspaces Manager, Barnet Council) introduced the report providing an update relating to on-going site management issues affecting Welsh Harp Reservoir.

Mr Gunyon informed the Committee that Barnet now has a new Labour administration in the borough after the May 2022 elections and his team are currently working through the Labour Manifesto to ensure their works are streamlined with the proposals within the manifesto in relation to greenspaces.

Mr Gunyon updated that the Council has re-commissioned the support of Parkguard Ltd to assist with park patrols throughout the summer over the weekends and their primary role will be to support current public service provision, focusing on delivery that supports Council core services in fulfilling responsibilities. This will be achieved by providing visibility patrols with an emphasis engaging with the public, increasing public reassurance, and improving community safety.

On a final note, Mr Gunyon noted that the outline business case for the West Hendon Playing Fields Master plan was approved at Policy and Resources Committee 16 June 2021 and informed that the Council has appointed the Landscape Institute to coordinate a design competition whereby the procurement of this will enable the appointment of a Landscape Architect to assist with developing the design ready for planning.

Judy Shepherd commented in relation to the Parkguards and noted that residents had not seen a visible Parkguard presence in recent months. She continued that the water is likely to attract a lot of attention especially in the hot weather over the summer holiday and would like the Welsh Harp area to be a priority area for the Parkguard team to focus on. Mr Gunyon noted that his team regularly receive feedback on the services that Parkguard provide and ensure as part of resourcing arrangements they check this however he agreed to feed this back and encouraged anyone who is concerned with the services that Parkguard provide to email parks@barnet.gov.uk where a member of his team will follow this up.

Leo Batten commented on street cleansing and raised the suggestion of having countryside rangers to engage with the public and help improve the site. Mr Gunyon informed that the team are currently reviewing last year's patrol service and are potentially looking into having park rangers within the Borough, not just at specific locations. The team are trying to find a solution that will work for the whole Borough and there are a series of steps to go follow through on this options appraisal. An update will be provided at the next meeting.

ACTION: MR GUNYON

Leo Batten also asked about the West Hendon playing field master plan and when the WHJCC will be involved. Mr Gunyon commented that early engagement was carried out at the beginning of the scope and the Committee were informed of this at the time however later this year an architect and design in scope are to follow and the Committee will be made aware of this, there is no additional consultation proposed at the moment.

Ben Watt asked about the Master plan and if these plans will affect the outcome of the Silkstream footbridge. Mr Gunyon advised that the plans would not affect the footbridge, despite the plans showing where the footbridge will land, it is not a requirement of the masterplan and may well un-complicate the issue of the levels to where the bridges are. He noted that any residents who want to walk from the estate onto the playing fields will not be affected by access issues.

Leila Taheri asked in relation to the outcome of the enforcement operations and if any fines were distributed out. She also asked what steps have been put in place to ensure Parkguard engage with the public and noted that their presence had been minimal in the surrounding areas of the Welsh Harp. Mr Gunyon advised that the Parkguard team were not issued delegated powers from Barnet to issue fines and that they were only permitted to capture information which was then passed to the Community Safety Team (CST) for enforcement. In relation to Parkguards presence, the team are monitoring the activity and evidence that has been provided suggests that Parkguard are present and on foot in many of the parks they patrol, however this may not be the case in every visit they carry out and Mr Gunyon asked the Board to be mindful that the surrounding area of the Welsh Harp is a large space to cover.

Cllr Mitchell asked in relation to the new Biodiversity and Conservation Officer role and asked if the role would include working borough wide and collaboratively with neighbouring boroughs. Mr Gunyon advised that the role had been agreed and has been appointed to with the new member of staff starting in August. The role will include collaborative working throughout the borough and with neighbouring ones and noted that joint working is key between Barnet and Brent and the future review of the Management Plan.

Ben Watt asked for the new officer to be invited to the WHJCC and Mr Gunyon confirmed that they would be in attendance for the next meeting.

ACTION: Corinna Demetriou

Mr Gunyon gave an additional update on the West Hendon Allotments and highlighted the intention to bring back the usage of two derelict plots within the land the allotment sits on due to high waiting lists in this area. The team are currently working up concepts and plans and estimate costings and potential funding routes. The area will also include an orchard area and a pond with a focus on a balance around the allotment land and the natural area. Mr Gunyon will bring a further update at the next meeting.

ACTION: MR GUNYON

Leila Taheri asked if this is a definite piece of work or at the proposal stage. Mr Gunyon advised that is currently at the proposal stage until funding is found, however the team are keen to deliver this piece of work.

7. 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 main land-holding organisations: Brent Council, the London Borough of Barnet, and the Canal & River Trust.

Mr Williams highlighted the key issues to note of concern include the wildlife around the Welsh Harp and litter continues to be a concern despite many volunteer groups being involved to try to work to clear the problem. There are also problems with invasive species, and these are trying to be contained via the River Brent catchment.

Marshland conservation work on the southern shore has been temporarily paused to enable discussions with community groups and Mr Williams noted that visits take place have indicated that the previous work on the northern shore at the Welsh Harp Open Space has benefited a wide range of plants within the marshland vegetation along the edge of the reservoir while retaining a variety of trees on the shoreline landscape.

Mr Williams advised that discussions have continued between Brent Council and external partner organisations who have an interest in creating a viable environmental education centre. He noted that Thames 21 have agreed to provide some services for another year while discussions continue for a longer-term solution for the future of the Centre.

Cllr Mitchell thanked Brent Council for their commitment to the Welsh Harp Education Centre and noted that all initiatives are very important especially in the current times and is keen to keep the narrative around this going. She asked if any expressions of interest have been received to date and what efforts have been made to advertise the education centre. She also highlighted the community engagement element and asked what the current process of informing residents of the ongoing conversations surround the education centre. Mr Williams commented that Brent Council have put out many enquires to local organisations however this has not proved fruitful, and the main issue is finding a viable way of resourcing the centre, especially when it is in need of capital works and general maintenance.

Manfred Starkl asked in relation to the vision project and if the consultation exercise was carried out at the earliest part of the vision and going forward he would like to be involved in this. Mr Williams noted this request and thanked Manfred for all the work carried out on the marshland and conservation of the area.

Suzanne noted that her organisation had previously put forward proposals to Brent Council a working group partnering with other local organisations to assist with the taking over of the education centre, in particular organisations who care of animals and nature which would enrich the local environment and would do as much or as little as we would need them to. Mr Williams agreed to make contact to further explore this option.

ACTION: MR WILLIAMS

Martin Francis, a local resident from Brent asked about the education centre and the various campaigns to save it many times. He suggested a local company, Carys who previously were interested in getting involved when Thames21 took over and suggested making contact with them. He also asked what Thames21 are offering in terms of resource for the additional year they will be available and if this is being marketed in the borough. He also asked about the status of Planet House. Mr Williams advised the

Planet House will need significant investment as much of the building is beyond repair. He continued those discussions are ongoing with Thames21 about what activities they can cover and Mr Williams will update the Board once these are confirmed. He noted that any further information in relation to the education centre can be directed to Brent.Parks.Services@brent.gov.uk and all emails will be picked up and dealt with.

ACTION: MR WILLIAMS

Leo Batten asked about the education centre and noted he had made requests to Brent Council on the possibility of exploring the use of the centre to hold adult lectures in the evening on environmental issues. A lot more seriousness needs to be given to the centre, would like to see more serious discussion going on around it, children need to be made more aware of this.

ACTION: MR WILLIAMS

Cllr Liz Dixon noted the need to come up with some proposals and solutions.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair introduced Ben Watt from Future Habitats – new initiative by Cool Oak aimed at restoration projects at the Welsh Harp, some doable by guided volunteers and some with funding. To improve wetland and flood resilience and installation of dead hedges. Each project is accompanied by a detailed map showing the scope of works. A good launch and good interest this month and CEO of Canal and River Trust has given good feedback. Brent is also a national lottery funded priority area. All encouraged to look at the website Cool Oak. About people, mental wellbeing in cared for greenspaces and in an era of climate change it is about heatwave relief, a sponge in rainfall. All is very crucial.

Manfred Starkl highlighted the importance of ensuring the public know exactly where they can canoe on the Welsh Harp and suggested some clear signage to highlight this. Judy Shepherd agreed and suggested that the organisations who support the Welsh Harp could put information on their websites also to make this clear to those planning on using the facilities.

Manfred Starkl also highlighted the issue of stuck sailors of the reservoir and requested a further conversation to discuss his request that a section of the harp should be kept as a training area. He also asked for the owners of the land to be responsible for necessary signage and not the environmental groups.

Leo Batten asked for an update on Barratt and The Chair noted she would like to look at the impacts of what has already been decided before a wider update would be given to the Board.

Dale Langdon highlighted the recent problems Hendon Rifle Club has faced in relation to large numbers of dogs being walked which is causing worry for some children using the Welsh Harp. Mr Gunyon advised that Barnet currently do not have restrictions on the number of dogs that can be walked, however Brent has a restriction of 4. He continued that there is nothing in the law to restrict numbers however this is currently being looked at by the Barnet Community Safety and Licensing Teams. Mr Gunyon advised he would bring an update to the next meeting.

ACTION: MR GUNYON

Neil Earnshaw gave a brief update on the Welsh Harp joint vision and noted that most members were aware that landowners have been developing a vision which has been

been ongoing for the last year. The joint vision includes vegetation clearance work, hydrographic surveys, and other key pieces of work. Neil commented that he had met with the National Lottery and the reservoir will qualify as a priority area for funding, so he is exploring this. There is a review session on the visionary document scheduled for 18th August where everything included will be discussed, including improving signage around the Welsh Harp Looing at improving signage also.

Leila Taheri noted that the Environment agency was not in attendance and would like an update on the trash screens as there is an ongoing issue with these. Neal Hider from the Environment Agency was in attendance however advised that the main issue with this is the public putting rubbish into the river in the first instance. Neal confirmed he would make contact with colleagues and an update will come to the next meeting and would make contact with Leila on this issue.

ACTION: NEAL HIDER

Fly tipping was also raised and it was agreed that an update on this issue from both Barnet and Brent would come to the next meeting, in particular enforcement and prosecution. The Chair noted that CCTV was high on the agenda for the new Labour administration in Barnet, and would discuss this with the Chair of the Communities, Leadership & Libraries Committee, Councillor Sara Conway for a further update.

ACTION: CORINNA DEMETRIOU

9. ANY OTHER ITEMS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES ARE URGENT

None.

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 23rd November 2022

The meeting finished at 8.40 pm

Councillor Anne Clarke
Chair