

MINUTES OF THE WELSH HARP JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 24th February 2004 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Harrod (Chair, London Borough of Brent) and Councillor Fox (London Borough of Brent), together with Roy Beddard (Welsh Harp Conservation Group), John Bird (West Hendon Community Forum), John Colmans (London Wildlife Trust), Frank Hewlett (Barnet Council for Sport and Recreation), Jean Ivatt (Woolmead Avenue Residents and Welsh Harp Area), Dorothy Jakes (Birchen Grove Residents' Association), Julie Johnson (Local Agenda 21), Mike Manuel (British Waterways), Malcolm Scott (Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre Action Group), Brian Turgoose (Welsh Harp Sailing Association).

Peter Walker (British Waterways) was also present.

The following officers were also in attendance:

Mark Evison (Barnet Greenspaces Officer), Michael Read (Brent Council, Assistant Director of Environment) and Leslie Williams (Brent Council, Parks Service).

The following Councillor was also in attendance:

Councillor Jones (Brent Council, Lead Member for Environment and Planning).

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Burton, Ghosh, Offord and Sodha (London Borough of Barnet), Councillors McGovern and O'Sullivan (London Borough of Brent), Harry Mackie (West Hendon Youth Club), Haydn Matthews (Welsh Harp Youth Sailing Base), Leo Batten (Welsh Harp Conservation Group) and Graham Meyers (Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre).

1. Declarations of Interests

There were none.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 9th December 2003

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 9th December 2003 be received and approved as a true and accurate record subject to the following addition to Item 6: "A question was asked as to the number of schools that made use of the facilities at the Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre, Karen Tyerman promised to investigate and report back."

3. Matters Arising

Item 8 - Local Nature Reserve

Regarding the difficulty of ascertaining ownership of some land at Welsh Harp, Mark Evison reported that the areas reported at the last meeting as probably being owned by Barnet were indeed owned by Barnet but those areas where they were unclear as to ownership remained unclear.

4. Public Speaking Arrangements

There were none.

5. Graham Myers

It was reported to the Committee that Graham Myers was stepping down as the Committee representative from the Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre due to ill health. The Committee requested that the Chair write a letter to Graham wishing him well and thanking him for his past contributions to the Committee.

5. Welsh Harp Reservoir Management Plan (Brent)

The Consultative Committee received a report from Leslie Williams updating it on progress on the Welsh Harp Reservoir Management Plan (Brent) and related issues. He stated that the management plan has been made available on the council's website and a copy has been deposited with English Nature.

Leslie Williams reported on various aspects of the plan, including that work had been undertaken to manage tree growth in the marshland next to the reservoir, that maintenance of the lottery heritage projects was ongoing and that investigations into fly-tipping and pollution incidents was on-going. He reported that the Council were still waiting for information from the potential new occupiers of Neasden Pavilion.

He informed the Committee that Brent Council hoped to be ready to confer Local Nature Reserve status on the Welsh Harp site by April but that as it was a joint plan with British Waterways and Barnet Council, the designation could not go ahead until all parties were ready. The boundary of the Nature Reserve would, in Brent, equate with the current boundary of the site and the current management plan would become the management plan of the Local Nature Reserve.

Leslie Williams announced that the date of the next Kingsbury and Welsh Harp Open Day had been fixed for 31st May 2004. Concern was expressed as to whether there were currently enough volunteers for the event and the Committee was asked to encourage its member organisations to become involved.

In general discussion it was noted that the flytipping problem, whilst less than previously, was still an issue and it was also reported that some prosecutions were currently being pursued. It was suggested that a boardwalk between the industrial estate and the Welsh Harp site may help to discourage polluters and also make investigations and general access easier. Further evidence of litter problems was presented to the Committee and Mike Manuel promised that British Waterways would investigate. He also expressed the view that these sorts of problems were for the whole community to tackle and not just the land owners. It was also suggested that the Open Day be used to publicise the problem and the costs and damage involved.

RESOLVED:-

that the report be noted and that officers will be completing the remaining stages of the Local Nature Reserve designation.

6. Welsh Harp Reservoir Management Plan (Barnet)

The Consultative Committee received a report from Mark Evison updating them on progress on the Welsh Harp Reservoir Management Plan (Barnet) and related issues.

Mark Evison reported that work had begun on trees that were causing most concern to residents, these were being pollarded. Work was continuing on the Heritage Lottery Project and it was hoped that the new full accessible viewing platform would be completed by the end of the week and that the whole project would be completed by April 2004. It was reported that Barnet's work to designate a Local Nature Reserve was well underway and, particularly now that contentious areas had been removed from the proposal, progress should continue steadily.

In general discussion it was suggested that the open day be used to publicise the new bird watching facilities and the idea to encourage a local celebrity to open the facility was also put forward. It was reported that the Welsh Harp Sailing Association had performed tree coppicing work on the Brent section of the reservoir. It was suggested that they liaise with Mark Evison at Barnet Council so that they could cover some of Barnet's section as well.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the progress of the tree management scheme and heritage lottery project be noted;
- (ii) that the progress towards local nature reserve declaration be noted,

7. British Waterways

Peter Walker (British Waterways) gave a presentation outlining the progress made by British Waterways on works at Brent Reservoir (Welsh Harp). The Committee were informed that advance clearance along the left bank had been completed in January. It was planned to work on the Penstocks (vertical sluice gates) during the spring with the main body of the dam work starting in the early summer this was later than originally proposed and the likely completion date was now early 2005.

During general discussion it was noted that funding for the engineering works was not yet fully confirmed, although the Committee were assured that this was a formality. It was also noted that a letter had been sent out to all affected residents before Christmas and that there had not been a noticeable number of problems reported. In response to a question regarding environmental planting, Peter Walker replied that hedge work and general seeding were being planned after the works were completed. Questions were raised as to whether British Waterways were planning to permanently lower the water level in the reservoir. Mike Manuel responded that there was currently a nationwide project looking at water levels but that any decisions from the study were not likely to be agreed for some years.

RESOLVED:-

that the report be noted.

8. **Proposed Ecology Park**

Malcolm Scott (Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre Action Group) presented an update on progress to gather funding for a feasibility study into a proposed Eco Park at Welsh Harp. It was reported that the Greater London Authority had promised up to £10,000 for the study. This, along with previous funding promises from other organisations meant that more than half the required funding was in place. He informed the Committee that other organisations were also being approached including, English Nature, British Waterways and others.

Malcolm Scott informed the Committee that the plan was to complete a feasibility study which could then be put out to extensive consultation and that from this a plan would emerge that would ensure the long-term future of the site, especially in view of the historical funding difficulties experienced by the Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre.

In response, Councillor Jones and Michael Read (Brent Council, Assistant Director of Environment) informed the Committee that a leadership discussion had taken place to look at these proposals and that whilst the enthusiasm and commitment of the Action Group were very welcome, Brent Council felt that the scope of the proposed study would need to be altered before the Council would be prepared to support it. They suggested that members of the Action Group should meet with them and the leader of the Council to discuss matters further. They also informed the Committee that the 2004-05 budget included increased revenue funding for both the Education Centre and the Parks Service and a significant capital programme for the Parks Service. It was hoped this would lead to noticeable improvements at Welsh Harp. In general discussion it was noted that the extra funding was welcome but that it was important to note that council funding (at both Brent and Barnet) could grow or shrink in the future and that it was important to ensure that other regular streams of funding were encouraged. It was also suggested that a 'Friends of' charity be set up to help with the funding and running of the education centre.

Malcolm Scott requested that the Council send him a letter setting out their views on the Eco Park Feasibility Study so that the Action Group could discuss the matter further.

RESOLVED:-

that the report be noted.

9. **Planning Issues**

There were none.

10. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Consultative Committee will be confirmed after the Councils' Annual Meetings in May 2004.

11. **Any Other Urgent Business**

Welsh Harp Youth Sailing Base

Concerns were expressed that there were rumours that the Welsh Harp Youth Sailing Base was to be closed and that two members of staff had already been handed redundancy notices. It was reported that the closure of the site was listed as a saving in Barnet Council's budget for 2004/05.

The meeting ended at 9:30 pm

R HARROD
Chair

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