



Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee

Tuesday, 7 March 2006

Report from the Director of Environment and Culture

For Information

Wards Affected:
ALL

Report Title: Welsh Harp Management Plan

Forward Plan Ref:

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report presents progress on the Brent Reservoir / Welsh Harp Management Plan and related issues. The Management Plan is a joint Management Plan between the three main land-holding and land-managing organisations in the vicinity: Brent Council, British Waterways, and the London Borough of Barnet.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to indicate whether they would prefer the launch event for the Local Nature Reserve to coincide with the annual Kingsbury and Welsh Harp Open Day on Spring Bank Holiday Monday; or to be held on another date.
- 2.2 Members are asked to note the Report.

3.0 Detail

Welsh Harp Management Plan

- 3.1 The Welsh Harp / Brent Reservoir Management Plan is administered by officers of the land owning and land managing organisations. An annual review is undertaken in approximately July each year, and then reported to Committee for the Committee's recommendations. Since 2001, officers have included in the Management Plan process the additional responsibilities of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to produce Management Plans for SSSIs.

- 3.2 The Management Plan was signed by English Nature on 15 May 2003. Subsequent amendments have been reported to this Committee. English Nature have indicated that for minor changes to the Management Plan, there is no need to seek their formal consent.
- 3.3 The current version of the Management Plan has been placed on the internet via Brent Council's website at www.Brent.gov.uk/parks (from there go to the 'Brent Biodiversity Action Plan homepage and then navigate via the Brent Reservoir Action Plan). A map of the zones is also provided on the internet; and a copy of the map is also attached to this report.
- 3.4 Officers have undertaken minor revisions and updating to the Management Plan. A copy of the proposed revised version will be placed on the internet, alongside the current version, as noted in paragraph 3.3, above. The changes reflect in particular the completion of the Heritage Lottery Award works, the works by British Waterways to improve the dam wall and to extend the dam as a bund into Neasden Recreation Ground, the West Hendon Regeneration project, the closure of the Welsh Harp Youth Sailing base, changes at the Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre, the demolition of Neasden Pavilion; and the Declaration of the Local Nature Reserve.
- 3.5 It is suggested that as the re-drafting of the Management Plan has extended into 2006, that the revised version will serve for 2006 and until the next review in 2007.
- 3.6 Cross-boundary working by enforcement officers: Officers of Barnet, British Waterways and Brent have continued to cooperate as far as practicable.
- 3.7 Dam wall works. Brent Council Parks Service continues to work with British Waterways as part of their works to the dam wall. The construction of the bund, a mounded extension to the dam wall, at Neasden Recreation Ground is substantially complete.

Heritage Lottery Award

- 3.8 Maintenance of the Heritage Lottery Fund award project continues.

Neasden Pavilion

- 3.9 The capping of the remaining hard standing with clean soil from the dam wall works following the demolition of the Neasden Pavilion was undertaken in January/February 2006.

Local Nature Reserve

- 3.10 The annual Kingsbury and Welsh Harp Reservoir Open Day is due to be held on the Spring Bank Holiday Monday 29 May 2006. It has been suggested that this would be an appropriate venue for the public launch of the Welsh Harp / Brent Reservoir Local Nature Reserve. Holding the launch at that event could ensure a diverse local audience and a more inclusive event. It would also enable more efficient use of volunteer and member organisation staff time; and of publicity and other resources; particularly as there is no specific budget for a launch event. Conversely, some people are likely to be away from the area on the Spring Bank Holiday Monday. Officers have not investigated an alternative launch date, but the indications were of an event during office hours. Members of the Committee are asked to indicate whether a launch during the Open Day or on another date would be preferred.

Welsh Harp Project Group

- 3.11 *Check: A separate report / presentation is being made to the Committee in respect of the Welsh Harp Project Group. The Project Group, including representatives of many of the member organisations of the Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee, met for the first time on 13 January 2006. It was agreed that the Project Group is a specific working group and will report to the WHJCC.*

'Tadpole Pond' area

- 3.12 At recent meetings of the WHJCC concern has been raised about the misuse of the area around what has become known as the 'Tadpole Pond'. This has become a focal point for both visitors and for unauthorised activities e.g. barbecues. The 'Tadpole Pond' is located near to the boundary between Brent and Barnet, overlooks the Reservoir and is well served with paths.
- 3.13 During 2006, the Area Parks Manager hopes to trial subtle changes in the vegetation management of this area to deter people from setting-up barbecues while continuing to facilitate public access. In particular, it is suggested that the mowing of the grassland that is most used for barbecues will be reduced. The area involved is only approximately 10 metres by 10 metres in area. Other nearby mown areas, primarily the wide paths, will continue to be cut.

Summary of damage to the Welsh Harp Open Space following recent unauthorised access

- 3.14 At the last meeting of the WHJCC (7 December 2005), Committee requested that Officers report on the extent of damage, particularly to the 'tadpole' pond following the unauthorised rave party on the night of 5-6 November 2005.

- 3.15 Following an inspection by the Grounds Maintenance team of the Parks Service on the morning of 7 November 2005, some tyre marks were found on nearby grass, there was a limited quantity of litter and the remains from a fire. It is not known if these were all the result of the 'rave' event. As far as we can ascertain there was no, or only insignificant, damage to the pond near to the Borough boundary.
- 3.16 It is possible that the nuisance to residents, particularly from noise, was a more significant environmental issue. Unfortunately, the Council did not receive any reports of the incident at the time and therefore no officers were called-out to deal with the issue during that night and early morning. It is repeated here that the Council's out of hours 'phone number for emergency issues is 020 8937 1234. If the issue is related to parks, the request should be for 'Parks Standby'.
- 3.17 During the weekend of 16-19 December 2005, the entrance gates to Neasden Recreation Ground at Aboyne Road were severely damaged. There was no evidence that access to Neasden Recreation Ground was actually gained, nor was there any evidence of any authorised or unauthorised events. Rather, the nature of the damage suggests that it was caused by a large lorry or other large vehicle. In this case, damage amounted to several thousands of pounds.

Signage

- 3.18 At the last meeting of the WHJCC (7 December 2005), Committee requested that Officers report on the policy on signage, particularly in relation to deterring anti-social behaviour.
- 3.19 The emphasis now is to provide parks in which visitors feel welcome and for which signage enhances the visitor's experience. The Parks Service has a policy of making parks as 'welcoming' as possible and strives to provide quality parks for people to enjoy.
- 3.20 Signage serves a number of functions which may include providing a reminder about activities which are prohibited, but which may also include providing directional information, safety advice and site interpretation. Signage that is provided to deter anti-social behaviour is provided as a reminder of the law, bye-laws or of codes of practice (e.g. the Country Code). The Council cannot provide signage covering the whole spectrum of legislation; rather it is expected that visitors will exercise individual or collective responsibility.
- 3.21 The Parks Service exercises a general presumption against the provision of 'Do Not' type signs. The Parks Service does not consider that anything more than the minimum of 'Do Not' signs is conducive to enhancing the visitor experience. The Parks Service does use a "No Dogs" and a "No unaccompanied adults in this area" signs for play grounds. The Service does have a "Please do not feed the birds" sign, which is also available in a range of languages, which are used in

those areas where the excess feeding of birds causes public health issues. Generally the Service does not use 'No Ball Games' nor 'Please Keep off the Grass'; and in that respect Park Wardens will use practical discretion in the interpretation of the Bye-laws. The Parks Services' Service Operational Plan indicates that consideration could be given to signage in relation to raising awareness of dog fouling to reduce problems on sports pitches.

- 3.22 Specific signage may be a stipulation of a grant award, e.g. the Heritage Lottery Fund have required interpretative and directional signage as part of grants for the Welsh Harp and for Gladstone Park. Green Flag Award: Some of Brent's parks have been entered and others are potential candidates for future Green Flag Awards. The criterion for the Green Flag Awards cites the use of signage in a similar way to the grant awarding bodies, with particular emphasis on providing information on the availability of and the location of facilities, together with directional information to the facilities. Green Flag Award criterion also emphasises the need to make parks 'welcoming'.
- 3.23 Temporary signage, e.g. the use of laminated sheets can sometimes prove cost-effective in providing signage of a temporary nature to cover a short-term or seasonal issue. An example here is the use of 'No Barbeques' signs at Neasden Recreation Ground provided to deter a seasonal problem and at a time when barbeques were becoming a significant problem.
- 3.24 There is a financial cost to providing signage, in terms of the specification, design, construction, installation and maintenance. These costs need to be considered in relation to other priorities on the service.
- 3.25 Landscape issues: The Parks Service considers that a proliferation of signs detracts from the visual landscape of parks and open spaces. The Audit Commission, in their report on Brent Parks of June 2002, commented that some park entrances were unwelcoming. They illustrated this with, for example, a photograph of a park entrance with a proliferation of signage. The response of the Parks Service has been to provide a higher quality of park entrance notice boards while removing much of the clutter of the other signage. The Parks Service will also ensure that each site with a notice board shows the bylaws. The Parks Service are increasing noticeboards to each site and will have every site provided for by 2007/8.

- 3.26 The Parks Service undertook an internal Environmental Management Programme on Parks signage in 1999-2000 and subsequently the role in co-ordinating signage has been managed by the Assets Manager. Recently the Service has embarked on a system of 'branding' for signage to create a more uniform approach across all parks and open spaces. In practice, the signage will be co-ordinated in terms of size, style and colour. Currently the provision of signage could be considered under three broad headings:
Entrance notice boards with maps, contact information, bye-laws, and temporary notices.
Interpretative signage usually sited within parks at specific locations of interest.
Directional signage at points within, and sometimes outside, of parks.
- 3.27 A range of information is also provided on the Council and Parks Service website and in various leaflets.

Locks

- 3.28 At the last meeting of the WHJCC (7 December 2005), Committee requested that Officers report on the policy on locks for parks, particularly in relation to the possibility that the organisers of recent rave parties may have access to a key to vehicular park entrances. At present we have no information on how a vehicle gained access during the night of 5-6 November 2005 in an area where both Brent and Barnet have adjoining open spaces. A suggestion made at the last WHJCC, was that the organisers have access to a key.
- 3.29 While it would be inappropriate to detail lock specifications in this report, the Parks Service does need to provide locks that both deter unauthorised access while enabling access by a range of authorised access including grounds maintenance vehicles, Park Wardens, Mobile Patrols, the emergency services, contractors and authorised educational, disabled access and other users. The lock mechanism and key issue are considered on a site by site basis, but also in relation to management issues for the whole of the parks service. There is often a need to compromise between preventing access to all unauthorised users and enabling access to those servicing the parks or by pre-arranged visits.

Kingsbury and Welsh Harp Reservoir Open Day

- 3.30 The event will be held on Spring Bank Holiday Monday 29 May 2006. The Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre is hoping to be open this year.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 None specific, but some of the priorities identified in the Management Plan will require additional resources if they are to be implemented in

the future. For Brent Council Parks Service, the Management Plan is implemented and improvements programmed via the Brent Parks Service Parks Strategy, and Service Operational Plan. Thus implementation is partially dependent upon revenue and capital budgets for grounds maintenance and for parks management. The Parks Service pursues other sources of finance and opportunities for partnership working that may become available. The Welsh Harp Project Group will discuss the financial implications of projects within the remit of that group.

5.0 Legal Implications

5.1 Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW) and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), the land owners / managers are required to consult with English Nature for any operation in the list of 'Potentially damaging operations'; and English Nature will issue a consent for the works unless the operation is likely to have a significant impact on any of the notified features of interest on the site. CROW (and section 28G of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981) places a duty on all public bodies to take reasonable steps, consistent with the proper exercise of the authority's functions, to further the conservation of the site. CROW also encourages land owners to produce Management Plans for the SSSI, which when approved by English Nature, enable the carrying out of the management works specified in the Management Plan. This can reduce the administrative problems inherent in having to obtain consent for each individual item of management work.

6.0 Diversity Implications

6.1 The proposals in this report have been subject to screening and officers believe that there are no diversity implications.

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications

7.1 None specific.

8.0 Environmental Implications

8.1 The Welsh Harp Management Plan co-ordinates current environmental works in the Reservoir area, and highlights works that are a future priority.

Background Papers

Dated correspondence and other documents referred to in the Report including:

Brent Reservoir / Welsh Harp Management Plan.

Equality Impact Assessment Completion Form: Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee: Welsh Harp Reservoir Management Plan: 20 January 2005. Form dated 06b.01.2005.

Contact Officers

Any person wishing to inspect the above papers should contact Mr Leslie Williams, Environmental Policy Officer, Brent Parks Service, 660 Harrow Road, Wembley, Middlesex HA0 2HB. Tel.: 020 8937 5628. E-mail: Leslie.Williams@Brent.gov.uk

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