

MINUTES OF THE WELSH HARP JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 7th March 2006 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Harrod (Chair, London Borough of Brent), Councillor O'Sullivan (London Borough of Brent) and Roy Beddard (Welsh Harp Conservation Group), John Colmans (London Wildlife Trust), Frank Hewlett (Barnet Council for Sport and Recreation), Dorothy Jakes (Birchen Grove Residents' Association), Geoffrey Johnson (Woolmead Residents' Association), Julie Johnson (Local Agenda 21), Harry Mackie (Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre), Judy Shepherd (West Hendon Community Forum) and Brian Turgoose (Welsh Harp Sailing Association).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sodha, Ghosh and Offord and from Malcolm Scott, Dr Batten, Yvonne Harrison and from the Environment Agency and the Greater London Authority.

Also in attendance were Councillor Mary Farrell (London Borough of Brent), Leslie Williams (Brent Parks Service), Mark Evison (Barnet Parks Service), Marianne Locke and Alex Sydney (London Borough of Brent), John Drake and Roger Kelly (Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre Action Group), D Moorcroft (Hendon Rifle Club) and Clive Cohen (London Wildlife Trust).

1. Declarations of Interests

There were none declared.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 7th December 2005

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 7th December 2005 be received and approved as an accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

There were none.

4. Public Speaking Arrangements

There were none.

5. Welsh Harp Eco-Park Feasibility Study

John Drake and Roger Kelly introduced a presentation providing an update on the feasibility study into the potential to site an Eco Park at the Welsh Harp reservoir. They emphasised that the Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre Action Group (WHEECAG) had undertaken the project due to concerns about the future funding and sustainability of the current education centre and they wished to explore potential options for the site.

They explained that the Centre for Alternative Technology had completed their study and that the findings had now been presented to the projects financial backers and some other interested parties. The report highlighted the different options for an eco park including possible foci (such as biodiversity, power, transport) for the park, financial information and visitor numbers.

It was explained that as the report had now been finalised it provided an opportunity for the local authorities and other groups to give their views should they wish and that WHEECAG were willing to consult with these groups. They also explained that they had put in an exploratory application for Lottery funding.

6. Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre

Marianne Locke, The Assistant Director for Arts and Learning (London Borough of Brent) presented the Committee with an update on the Council's position regarding the Education Centre. She explained that she was responsible for the Centre and that her section was now part of the Environment Department (following a recent Council reorganisation).

It was explained that the Council were keen to look into all possible options for the Education Centre particularly as they were aware that there had been issues in the past regarding the support of the centre, although many of these were now being addressed. She reported that the Council had met with WHEECAG to discuss their proposals and that a working group had been set up of interested parties to look at options for the centre. It had been agreed at that meeting that the council would continue to work on their improvement plans for the centre and WHEECAG would continue to work on their eco-park plans, and that consultation options with local groups, and this Committee, would be explored.

During discussion of the above two items (5 and 6) various comments and issues were raised including the impact of any large scale scheme on the surrounding neighbourhoods and also on whether local people would be excluded from any development, including whether they would have to pay simply to enter the Welsh Harp site.

RESOLVED:-

that the Committee agrees with Brent Council's plans for improvements to the current Education Centre and that the Committee agrees that a successful Centre is an important component of Welsh Harp.

that, on the subject of a possible Eco-Park-style project, the Committee considers that all local groups should be thoroughly consulted and views heard and that this Committee had concerns over the potential negative impact of a large scale scheme at the site.

7. West Hendon Regeneration

Due to the unavoidable absence of Yvonne Harrison this item was postponed until the next meeting.

8. Welsh Harp Reservoir Management Plan (Brent)

The Consultative Committee received a report updating them on progress on the Welsh Harp Reservoir Management Plan (Brent) and related issues and it was noted that the plan was available on the Brent Council website for those who wished to view it.

A number of issues were reported, including, that the works on the dam walls were now more or less complete, that changes were planned to the area around the tadpole pond to discourage overuse of the area and that the next open day appeared to have a good deal of support from local groups. The Committee were asked if they would like the official launch of the local nature reserve to be on the same day as the open day.

It was reported that a survey had indicated no significant damage after the unauthorised rave party last year but that the nuisance and noise issues were potentially more significant. Following questions at the last meeting, it was explained that there was a presumption against placing too many signs in parks, particularly for 'do not' signs. It was also noted that the Brent bye-laws hadn't been updated for a long time due to the difficult process that would have to be undertaken but that the Council were able to prosecute lawbreakers under other legislation so didn't see this as an issue. It was also reported that there had been some problems with dogs being encouraged to damage trees on the site, possibly as a training method for dog fighting, and that the relevant authorities had been informed and investigations were on-going. Action had also been taken to discourage the damage.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the Committee agrees that the launch event for the Local Nature Reserve should coincide with the annual Kingsbury and Welsh Harp Open Day.
- (ii) that the report be noted.

9. West Harp Reservoir Management Plan (Barnet)

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

Officers introduced members of the Hendon Rifle Club to talk about issues of noise creation and disturbance of the wildlife at the Welsh Harp reservoir. They introduced a discussion on the effects of noise and the different types of noise created by firing guns, some of which could cause more potential problems than others. Some members of the Committee expressed concerns over the impact of the noise on wildlife and also on local people. However it was reported by Gun Club members that the local wildlife didn't seem bothered and, indeed, birds could regularly be seen feeding on the rifle range whilst firing was in progress. It was also noted that the relevant authorities such as the Councils and English Nature had no issues with the Gun Club or the noise levels generated.

Officers noted an amendment to their report, that in paragraph 8.4 it should have read that black powder shooting took place on Saturdays throughout the year.

It was noted that Barnet's bye-laws had now been submitted to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for informal approval. It was also reported that security bollards were being installed at Woodfield Park and that this would result in the removal of some large logs that were considered an eyesore.

RESOLVED:-

that the report be noted.

10. Planning Issues

A short discussion was held regarding the presenting of Planning Issues at Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee meetings. Officers explained that at the last meeting it had been noted that it was rare for Planning Issues to be presented to the Committee and there were concerns that such issues were not being presented.

It was explained that the Planning Department had reported that there had not been any planning applications recently that had directly affected Welsh Harp and so there hadn't been any reports at the meetings. However, they were willing to report applications that were near Welsh Harp, for interest, if the Committee requested them but that the timetable to approve planning applications was much shorter than the Committee meeting cycle and so many would already have been settled before the Committee meetings took place. It was agreed that they did not need to circulate this type of application but that the Planning Department were to make sure to consult if an application was received that directly affected the Welsh Harp site.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Consultative Committee would be confirmed after the Councils' Annual Meetings in May 2006.

12. Any Other Urgent Business

A vote of thanks to the Chair was proposed in recognition of his work for the Committee and that this was to be his last meeting as he was standing down at the local elections in May 2006. In return the Chair thanked the Committee Members and wished them, and the Committee, every success for the future.

The meeting ended at 9:40pm

R HARROD
Chair

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