

**MINUTES OF THE WELSH HARP JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**  
**Wednesday 24 July 2013 at 7.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Hopkins (LB Brent) (Chair), Councillor Hart (LB Barnet) (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Johnson (LB Barnet) and Allie (LB Brent) and Molly Savage (Local Agenda 21), Clive Cohen (London Wildlife Trust), Julia Touloumbadjian (Welsh Harp Sailing Association), Judy Shepherd (West Hendon Community Forum), Geoffrey Johnson (Woolmead Residents' Association) and Derrick Chung (West Hendon Residents' Association / Friends of York Park)

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors Khatri (LB Barnet) and Neale Hider (Environment Agency), Roy Beddard (Welsh Harp Conservation Group) and Harry Mackie (Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre)

**1. Election of Chair and Vice Chair**

RESOLVED:

- i. That Councillor Hopkins be elected Chair for the 2013/14 municipal year.
- ii. That Councillor Hart be elected Vice Chair for the 2013/14 municipal year.

**2. Declarations of interests**

None declared.

**3. Deputations (if any)**

There were no deputations.

**4. Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2013 be approved as a correct record subject to the following amendment: the resolution recorded under the item 'Presentation by Barratt Metropolitan LLP - New Regeneration Application, West Hendon' be amended to read:

- i. That the Committee note the contents of the presentation provide by Barratt Metropolitan LLP
- ii. That questions were asked by the committee and the committee was generally in opposition to the plans as presented by Barratt Metropolitan LLP.

**5. Matters arising**

Members expressed that as an advisory body it would be beneficial to have more detailed minutes taken of the committee's meetings.

RESOLVED:

That for the current and all future meetings of the committee a detailed account of the discussion of the committee be recorded in the minutes.

## 6. **Management Plan (Barnet)**

Tracey Sawyer (Parks and Open Space Officer – Barnet Council) introduced a report updating the committee on the current position on the Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and outlining on-going site management. The meeting heard that work had been undertaken in partnership with the Hendon Rifle Club to address the issue of fly tipping around the access road. Wooden Bollards had been installed around the green and a drop ATG bollard had been installed.

In the subsequent discussion, the committee raised several queries and issues. Concerns were highlighted regarding people sleeping rough in LNR and occupying disused sporting facilities. Clive Cohen (London Wildlife Trust) noted that otters were successfully being reintroduced, with reports of otters across the country becoming increasingly numerous. In view of this, he proposed that a holt be created in the Welsh Harp in anticipation of otters continuing to colonise new areas. In response, a number of members queried what the likely impact of otter occupation might be on the natural environment and leisure use of the Welsh Harp. A member of the committee noted that a kingfisher bank had previously been established in the area but had since been allowed to silt up.

In answer to the questions and concerns raised, Tracey Sawyer confirmed that she would refer the reports of rough sleeping to the Safer Neighbourhoods Team and Homelessness team, and would look into the condition of the Kingfisher bank. Leslie Williams advised that both Brent and Barnet Council, as well as other boroughs along the river and tributaries of the Brent river had been collaborating on a Brent River Catchment Management Plan. Otters were not yet on the agenda however, as the principal priority in establishing the plan was to improve the habitat of the river and reduce pollution. At the present time, the Welsh Harp was in too poor a condition and was too isolated to present an attractive habitat for otters. Clive Cohen suggested that a holt could be established and forgotten about for the time-being. Otters were very timid creatures and it was unlikely that they would cause disruption to the leisure use of the Welsh Harp.

RESOLVED:

- i. That the report be noted
- ii. That in view of the differing views expressed by the committee regarding the establishment of an otter holt, the officers of both Brent and Barnet explore the implications of this proposal and report back at the next meeting of the committee.

## 7. **Management Plan (Brent)**

Leslie Williams (Strategy and Service Development Officer) presented a report to the committee setting out the progress made on the Brent Reservoir / Welsh Harp Management Plan. The committee heard that the construction of a Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) at Neasden Recreation Ground had recently been completed and was now available for use by the local community. Landscaping improvements were scheduled to be made by the contractor which would include the re-seeding of grass areas disturbed by the construction works, and the planting of a hedgerow of *Rosa rugosa*. The committee was further advised that the Welsh Harp Open Space had been inspected in June 2013 and had retained its Green Flag status. Leslie Williams also provided additional detail with respect to the Brent River Catchment Management Plan, noting that particular attention was being directed towards improving water quality and habitat, and removing physical obstructions to access along the river corridor.

During members discussion, it was queried what publicity had been provided for the new MUGA. Further detail was also sought regarding the condition of Horse Chestnut trees in the area and an update was sought on the treatment of Japanese Knotweed.

Leslie Williams advised that it was likely that the MUGA had been advertised via the sports pages of the website but he would look into this following the meeting. With regard to Horse Chestnut trees, there were currently two diseases that were affecting the trees on a national scale and the tree officers were keeping an eye out for any incidences of these in the locality. Clive Cohen (London Wildlife Trust) added that one of these was a virus known as Bleeding Canker for which there was no known treatment. The other condition was caused by an infestation by a Moth which had migrated from Poland. The only way to control this condition was to collect the leaves that fall in the autumn and dispose of them to prevent re-infestation the following year. This latter issue did not result in the death of the tree but did make it unsightly. Turning to the question regarding Japanese Knotweed, Leslie Williams advised that treatment was on-going. It was considered that the best way to treat this effectively would be to obtain an overview of all the incidences of it within the catchment and this was still a work in progress. This work was enabling main infestations to be addressed as well as key smaller ones to prevent further spread.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

**8. Environment Agency - verbal report (if any)**

None provided.

**9. Planning Issues (if any)**

The committee noted with considerable disappointment and concern that the London Borough of Barnet Planning and Environment Committee had granted planning permission to the redevelopment of the West Hendon Estate. The approved scheme would involve the construction of 2,000 homes, with buildings ranging from 2 to 29 storeys. It was also intended that two pedestrian bridges would be built to enable improved access to the Welsh Harp open space and West

Hendon recreation ground. Members of the committee advised the meeting that the scheme would now have to be submitted to the Mayor of London for approval. It was subsequently agreed that a letter should be sent to the Mayor of London expressing the committee's concerns and objections to the proposed development.

A full discussion to agree the issues to be included within the letter was held. Members emphasised that the Welsh Harp was a nature reserve and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It was agreed that the proposed development would cause considerable disruption and therefore harm to the wildlife of the area, in particular due to the process of construction, the size and scale of the development and the resulting increase in population density, and light and noise pollution. That some of the buildings would encompass 29 storeys was highly worrisome in view of the affect this could have on wind currents which could cause birds to fly into buildings or become confused and be displaced. There had been no mention of this latter issue in the application for the scheme. Members further highlighted that one of the proposed pedestrian bridges would span the wetland breeding grounds and it would be impossible for this to not negatively impact the birds nesting in the area, both during construction and afterwards when in use. Migratory birds that used the area included Gadwalls and Wigeons. Furthermore, it was known that there was a colony of Daubenton Bats roosting in the area. Following discussion around the diversity of the species found in the nature reserve, it was agreed that the most recent figures would be obtained on the number of different bird species observed.

As one of only approximately thirty-six SSSIs across London, the area was of considerable value not only locally but also London wide and nationally. A particular concern was expressed that allowing such a scheme would create a precedent and endanger similar areas in the capital. Members noted that both the London and Barnet Plans contained directives regarding the protection of SSSIs. Members considered that the wildlife assessment which had been undertaken were lacking, noting that the proposals for the scheme made no specific mention of the reservoir or of flora and fauna. The committee also noted the views of Natural England which were reported as advising that construction should not go ahead either in Summer or Winter due to the disruption that would be caused to birds. Members further advised that Natural England had also supported the appointment of an SSSI Warden to monitor the impact of the scheme on the SSSI; however, very little detail had been provided regarding the powers of this post and the funding provided was considered insufficient by the committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Chair draft a letter on behalf of the committee representing the concerns highlighted, to be circulated to all members of the committee before being finalised and sent to the Mayor of London.

10. **Date of next meeting**

The committee noted that the next meeting was scheduled for 14 November 2013.

11. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 8.47 pm

Councillor Hopkins  
Chair