

MINUTES OF THE WELSH HARP JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
Wednesday 28 July 2021 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor , Councillor and Councillors and

Also present: Councillors and

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors and

1. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair 2021-22

Councillor Vincent Lo (Brent) was elected as Chair and Councillor Anne Clarke (Barnet – in her absence) as Vice-Chair of the Joint Consultative Group for the 2021-22 Municipal Year.

2. Apologies for Absence and clarification of any alternate members

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor George Crane (London Borough of Brent) and Councillors Anne Clarke & Saira Don (London Borough of Barnet) with Councillors Alan Schneiderman & Helene Richman substituting for each member from the London Borough of Barnet. Apologies for absence were also received from Derrick Chung (West Hendon Residents Association).

3. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations made.

4. Deputations (if any)

5. Minutes of the previous meeting

AGREED that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 4 March 2021 be approved as a correct record

6. Matters arising

The following issues were raised under Matters Arising from the minutes of the previous meeting:

- (a) Further clarification was sought by a member of the Welsh Harp Conservation Group on the statement included within Minute 4a relating to the felling of a stretch of willow trees adjoining the Barrett Housing Development. It was not felt, as had been stated by Natural England, that sufficient alternative screening and protection was present in the area with concerns highlighted at the way in which the felling had been undertaken and gaps this had created along with the impact on the diversity of flora and water birds in the area. As a result it was agreed that a further response should be sought from Natural England regarding this issue.

(b) In relation to Item 5 of the previous minutes, it was noted that a response had yet to be obtained from Matthew Gunyon regarding the correspondence obtained from Matthew Offord MP from the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on the issue of trash screens. It was agreed that this would be followed up in order to obtain a response.

7. **Membership Application**

The Committee were asked to consider a membership application from the Silver Jubilee Park Residents Association. In considering the application, it was noted that the Resident Association had been an active local organisation in relation to their involvement with the Welsh Harp and that they were looking forward to contributing as a member organisation on the Joint Consultative Committee.

Freda Raingold (Silver Jubilee Park Residents Association representative) was invited to address the Joint Consultative Committee as Chair of the Silver Jubilee Park Residents Association in support of their application and highlighted the Association's involvement in seeking to improve and protect the Welsh Harp and contribution which it was felt they could make to the Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee, which was welcomed by Members.

As a result of the discussions, it was **RESOLVED** to approve the application and addition of the Silver Jubilee Park Residents Association as a member organisation on the Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee.

8. **Management Plan (Brent)**

Leslie Williams presented a report outlining progress on the Brent Reservoir / Welsh Harp Management Plan since the last meeting of the Committee and during the 2020/21 year to date. The Management Plan was jointly managed by the three main land-holding organisations: Brent Council, the London Borough of Barnet, and the Canal & River Trust.

In introducing the item, Lesley Williams drew the Committee's attention to the updated Action Plan attached as Appendix A to the report which detailed current progress and highlighted those actions that may require a longer time frame and/or the identification of the necessary resources.

In terms of specific issues, Lesley Williams highlighted the marshland conservation works which had been postponed due to the pandemic but were due to recommence after the bird breeding season in September 21. It was noted this would primarily be on the Canal and River Trust land, also touching upon the margins of the marshland edge of the reservoir range, as well as open spaces with a rich array of wildflowers, shrubs and trees. The work would be conducted by volunteers with the main focus on the southern shore of the reservoir and consent obtained from Natural England for the programme of works. In noting the nature of work to be undertaken the Committee were advised of the positive impact which it was expected to have in relation to habitat and wildlife, tree growth, landscape and amenity and also water sports. It was also noted that the works to be undertaken would need to be carefully managed given some of the intricate variations in

vegetation on the southern side of the reservoir and need to consider the method of working to re-open views and stack the cut material.

Further updates were provided in relation to the work with partner organisations on litter clearance and the healthy walk programmes. Member organisations were also informed of reports that the oak processionary moth species had also recently been spotted at the Welsh Harp Open Space. The species could be an irritant to skin and lungs and whilst most people were unaffected, this could cause allergic reactions. The Forestry Commission had been working to try to control the spread of the species, with more details available via the link included in the Committee report.

Finally, the Committee was advised of the ongoing work relating to the future of the Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre, once it had been vacated by Thames 21. This involved a range of discussions with existing partners to understand the opportunities at the location in terms of its ongoing role as an education centre.

Thomas Oliver (Canal and Rivers Trust Local Area Operations Manager) was then invited to update the Committee on additional issues from an environmental perspective. He took the opportunity to advise members of the recent discovery of blue-green algae in parts of the reservoir. Whilst a natural occurrence, given the hazardous nature of this algae he advised that notifying signs had been installed to provide the necessary warning and the environmental team were also aware.

Questions and comments were then invited on the update, with the following issues raised.

A question was asked about the Brent Management Plan and what was meant by the reference under Marshland (northern arm of reservoir) to 'Restoration of shore by phase 1 of West Hendon redevelopment'. In response, Lesley Williams clarified that this related to part of the Barnet Management Plan and involved the clearance of screening willow trees on the bank of the North marsh of the reservoir. As highlighted earlier in the meeting, further concerns were expressed in relation to the loss of the trees with Neil Earnshaw (Canal and River Trust) advising, in response, that this work was carried out on the condition of replanting and reinstatement and in consultation with ecologists, Barretts, the Canal and River Trust and London Borough of Barnet. The aim had been to open up the view of the reservoir.

In view of the concerns expressed, members were keen to ensure that any similar type of work undertaken in the future was managed in a more sensitive way, given the ecological impact with an assurance provided that Natural England had also been consulted to ensure the work was undertaken in an appropriate way. Confirmation was provided that replanting was already in progress with the Canal and River Trust also willing, if necessary, to provide details of the work agreed at the time.

As no further issues were raised it was **AGREED** to note the Management Update from Brent

9. **Management Plan (Barnet)**

Cassie Bridger (Operational Director – Environment Barnet Council) presented a report updating the committee regarding the on-going site management issues and the position on the Local Nature Reserve (LNR).

The Committee noted that Barnet Council had been progressing the masterplan for West Hendon Playing Fields, with a business case having now been approved by the Council's Policy and Resources Committee on the 16th June. The business case included £18.8m of capital funding for delivery of the scheme, with the Council now working towards forming a Programme Board and a Project Team in order to develop the design work towards submission of a future planning application. The Committee requested that detail around development and delivery of the masterplan be reported to a future meeting. The link to the report considered by the Policy & Resources Committee is available below:

<https://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=692&MId=10888&Ver=4>

In terms of other recent activity, the Committee were advised of the work undertaken in relation to litter clearance efforts around the Welsh Harp as part of a borough-wide anti-litter and fly tipping campaign. This had involved a range of partners and local community groups with all involved thanked for their efforts. Details were also provided on the work being undertaken by Barnet's Greenspaces and Community Safety Teams, local police and other partners to identify and remove illegal encampments located around the Welsh Harp.

Questions and comments were then invited on the update, with the following issues raised.

Judy Shepherd (West Hendon Community Forum) expressed a number of concerns relating to problems being caused by an increase in illegal night time fishing around the Welsh Harp and the use of pontoons, with details sought on what preventative measures were being taken to tackle the issue. Cassie Bridger advised that the Council were aware of the issue and had installed and updated the signage in the area in order to provide clear guidance. In terms of wider enforcement activity 'ParkGuard' an organisation commissioned by Barnet to support park patrols and carry out enforcement activity would also be tasked (based on an intelligence led approach) and deployed to provide additional patrols in the area.. It was confirmed that whilst the primary goal would be to 'engage and educate' the officers involved did have enforcement powers that could be used, if required. Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environment Services, Brent Council) advised that Brent would also be willing to work in partnership with Barnet in order to support any relevant enforcement activity through its Neighbourhood Patrol Team. Neil Earnshaw (Canal and River Trust) advised they would also be willing to support any action taken working with their Fisheries Team. Given the level of concern expressed it was **AGREED** that a joint update from Barnet & Brent be provided for the next meeting outlining the current restrictions, measures available, risks and action being taken to address the concerns raised in relation to illegal night time fishing at the reservoir.

Member organisations were advised that in order to support the deployment of the Neighbourhood Patrol teams any incidents witnessed could be reported via the Parks@barnet.gov.uk mailbox or on 0800 807060

A further issue was raised in relation to progress on the footbridge across the Northern Marsh. In response the Committee was advised that a meeting had now taken place with discussions progressing and on which a further update would be provided for the next meeting of the Committee.

As no further issues were raised it was **AGREED** to note, subject to the actions identified above) the Management Update from Barnet.

10. **Welsh Harp Vision - Verbal Report**

Neil Earnshaw (Canal and River Trust) was then invited to provide the Joint Consultative Committee with an update on the Welsh Harp "Vision" project which involved both Brent & Barnet Councils, the Trust, London Wildlife Trust, Thames 21, the Greater London Authority (GLA) and Natural England. The project had been established to develop an overarching vision for the Welsh Harp and review of the Management Plan. It was reported that DK-CM had been appointed as the lead consultant on the project and to lead on the detailed engagement process.

The Committee was advised that the initial phase of the project would involve the development of a strategic focus involving a baselining exercise to understand the environmental and social features of the Welsh Harp, which had been underway for two to three weeks. This baselining phase was expected to last until mid-August, prior to a more detailed engagement programme aimed at reaching out to a range of different organisations and local interest groups, including all members of the Joint Consultative Committee. The committee was advised this would be a citizen led approach, to give a strong voice to those already engaged and knowledgeable around the reservoir and Welsh Harp, with the intention of building a social and ecological portrait of the area and responding to the need for improved mapping and updating of biological records.

In terms of stakeholder engagement, the Committee was advised this would consist of a series of online and in person events designed to engage stakeholders, members of the public as well as previously hard to reach groups such as young people. The aim of the project would then be to produce a joint vision for the Welsh Harp, which it was planned to publish in November. This would then form the basis of supporting further partnership funding bids relating to ongoing management of the reservoir and the local environment. In terms of funding already secured, this included the Peoples Postcode Lottery (to support wetlands restoration work), as well as commitments from Natural England, both Barnet and Brent Councils. the Wildlife Trusts, GLA and Thames 21 in order to work collectively to ensure that all objectives were aligned to ensure the best outcome for the Welsh Harp as a site of specific scientific interest

Questions and comments were then invited on the update, with the following issues raised.

In response to a request for further details on the baseline assessment being undertaken, Neil Earnshaw advised that whilst the aim was to include a full ecological appraisal this was initially being based, due to the need to manage costs, on the use of existing knowledge and subsequent verification by ecologists.

Support for the project was also expressed by Thames 21 at the meeting with the Committee endorsing the approach outlined and inclusion of key deliverables as part of the final vision.

The suggestion was also made regarding use of volunteer ranger posts to support the engagement process. Member organisations were also keen to ensure that ways in which it may be possible to secure the sustainable long-term future of the Education Centre was included for consideration as part of the project.

Given the importance of the project, the Committee **AGREED** that progress updates should continue to be provided along with details on the final outcome in terms of the vision developed once complete.

11. **Dates of Future Meetings**

The dates for future meetings of the Committee were noted, as follows:

- Wednesday 17 November 2021 at 7pm (hosted by Brent) – to be held as an online meeting

Thursday 10 March 2022 at 7pm (hosted by Brent) – to be held as an online meeting

12. **Any other urgent business**

12.1 Welsh Harp Waste Management

An update was sought regarding progressing in addressing the issues raised at the previous meeting regarding waste and litter management. In response Neil Earnshaw (Canal and River Trust) advised that a series of meetings had now been held with a range of different stakeholders in order to progress a programme of active on-site clean ups within the area. Discussions had also been held with the Environment Agency in order to consider how clearance and regular servicing of the debris traps could be improved.

Thomas Olivier (Canal & Rivers Trust) advised that he would also share dates of future volunteering events to assist in the clearance programme and reminded those present of the need to avoid attempting to clear the debris traps by hand, given the safety issues identified.

The meeting closed at Time Not Specified

COUNCILLOR R MASHARI
Chair