

MINUTES OF THE WELSH HARP JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
Thursday 10 March 2022 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor , Councillor and Councillors and

Also present: Councillors and

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors and

1. **Apologies for absence and clarification of any alternative members**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Vincent Lo (London Borough of Brent).

2. **Declarations of Interest**

3. **Deputations (if any)**

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

AGREED that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Wednesday 17 November 2021 be approved as a correct record.

5. **Matters arising**

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

Min 10. Any Other Business – Barratt’s Challenge- Construction of Silk Stream Bridge

The Committee received an update from Ben Watt (Cool Oak Group), regarding the issue of the Construction of the Silk Stream Bridge in the Welsh Harp.

Members were updated that as part of the challenge, Cool Oak Group had met with Natural England, Councillors and local MPs in order to progress the work around the reservoir. It was updated that debris had been lifted off marshes of the reservoir, with £85,000 spent on restoration works in the east marsh during the winter. Council teams had also joined volunteers on various rubbish cleaning initiatives.

Moving on to speak around the Silk Stream Bridge, Members were updated that a challenge to this bridge was ongoing, and were referred to the letter written to the Senior Technical Manager at Barratts, responsible for the West Hendon Regeneration project. This letter outlined whether the construction of the proposed bridge would be fully consistent with the approved planning permission which had been granted. Members were also updated that representatives from Natural England had visited the site, and indicated that the planning terms may have been

contravened. To that end, a meeting had been proposed to take place in April to discuss the erection of the bridge, with representatives from Barratt's, Natural England and Barnet Council in attendance.

Members were then invited to ask questions on this update, which are summarised below:

- It was clarified that the proposals contained in the West Hendon Masterplan project were not directly linked to the construction of the Bridge.
- It was raised that a thorough analysis of the construction of the Bridge would be welcomed, including the ecological impact, as well as the impact on the local community. It was clarified that an ecological assessment of the area had been undertaken at the time of planning.

It was **AGREED** that Ben Watt and Leo Batten attend the meeting with Barratt's, Natural England and Barnet Council on behalf of the Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee.

6. **Management Plan (Barnet)**

Matthew Gunyon (Greenspaces Manager, Barnet Council) introduced the report providing an update relating to on-going site management issues affecting Welsh Harp Reservoir.

The Committee noted the updates provided in relation to the following issues:

- A restructure and recruitment of new staff was ongoing as part of the Barnet Greenspaces Service; two members of staff had been appointed for the two constituency areas within the Barnet areas of the Welsh Harp Reservoir.
- The parks patrol pilot, which ParkGuard had been commissioned to provide during summer 2021 at key hotspot locations, including Welsh Harp. It was expressed that it was planned to implement this again during 2022.
- The ongoing work being undertaken to develop the West Hendon Playing Fields Master Plan, following the outline business case and capital funding having been approved. This project was now seeking specific and specialist advice from landscape architects and design developers, which the Committee would be updated on in due course.

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

- It was asked what impact the West Hendon Masterplan project would have on the SSIs and nature reserves around the Welsh Harp, and it was clarified that this had been considered from a spatial planning perspective from the inception of the project. This work was also ongoing as the project developed in the future.
- The deployment of the Parks Patrol was noted, and it was asked why this was being implemented. It was answered that this was aimed at decreasing anti-social behaviour around the Welsh Harp.

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

7. Management Plan (Brent)

Leslie Williams (Project Officer, Brent Council) presented a report outlining progress on the Brent Reservoir / Welsh Harp Management Plan since the last meeting of the Committee and during the 2021/22 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.

The Committee noted the current progress in relation to the Management Action Plan, as had been detailed within Appendix A of the report, with further updates provided in relation to the following items:

- Marshland conservation work had been ongoing since September 2021, focussed on the southern Neasden Recreation Ground side of the reservoir. A meeting had taken place with local volunteers, and were supportive of the work which had taken place. The consultation process on further works had been aimed at improving the balance of habitats within the area, reducing the wind shadow across the reservoir for water sports and enhancing the landscape and amenity in terms of views across the Reservoir.
- The Healthy Walks programme was continuing, and the Welsh Harp environmental education centre, it had been agreed for Thames 21 to continue activities for a further year, with a full programme to be confirmed. It was noted that the centre required some infrastructure work in order to make the centre viable, which would incur a revenue cost. The Committee would continue to be kept updated regarding progress on the ongoing discussions regarding the future of the Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre.

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

- It was noted that expressions had been raised to extend the remit of classes at the Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre, including sessions for secondary schools and evening classes for adults. It was asked if these plans were still in place to be explored. It was explained that this was still being explored and had worked in other similar centres in London, but would rely on a viable consortium to bring people, resources and organisations together to make it happen.
- It was asked what the process was for reporting litter and rubbish around the Marshland, to which it was clarified that this could be reported via the website or the case emailed directly to the Brent Service/Leslie Williams.

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

8. 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 and had been established to develop an overarching vision for the Welsh Harp and review of the Management Plan.

Members were updated that since the last meeting, the joint vision had progressed and was nearing publication status, alongside a series of engagement activities to support this. It was explained that the publication came in two parts; the first being a joint atlas from a variety of sources, many of whom were involved in the Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee. The final version of the report was being worked through with comments from strategic partners, including Councillors and the Canal and River Trust. It was updated that after this process, a 'beta' version of the final report would be shared with a limited group of stakeholders, with the Joint Consultative Committee invited to view the report before it was finalised and shared with the public. It was highlighted that the forthcoming Local Elections presented further restrictions on the publication date, and therefore it would not be published until the completion of the Local Elections. Brent Council had supported the cost of a public exhibition upon publication of the Vision, which would be held at the Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre, which would be attended by a range of stakeholders.

Looking forward, there was a view to use the joint vision and support from stakeholders to then make funding bids on behalf of the Welsh Harp. Discussions had already taken place with the Heritage Lottery Fund, which could involve considerable sums of funding. The Chair of Natural England had also leant his support to any future funding bids, and the joint vision was attracting national attention.

In terms of practical matters, it was updated that several skip loads of debris had been recovered from around the Welsh Harp. As it was breeding season for birds, it was highlighted that this may result in damage to reed beds, with work ongoing to limit the impact of the damage. Around the East Marsh of the reservoir, signage was being designed to inform people around issues being addressed to preserve the SSSI, including removal of self-seeded willow and encroaching vegetation. Questions and comments were then invited on the update, with the following issues raised:

- It was asked whether details around the heritage of the Welsh Harp were included in the vision, to which it was answered that this had been taken into account, with heritage specialists and partnership groups feeding into this report.

With no further issues raised, the Committee thanked Neil Earnshaw for the update provided and **AGREED** that further progress updates should continue to be provided on development of the vision.

9. **Dates of Future Meetings**

Members were asked to note the provisional dates identified for future meetings of the Joint Consultative Committee during 2022/23 (Subject to final confirmation by each respective authority as part of the approval of their 2022/23 calendar of meetings):

- Wednesday 27 July 2022 at 7pm – to be held online hosted by London Borough of Barnet.
- Thursday 24 November 2022 at 7pm – to be held online hosted by London Borough of Barnet
- Thursday 16 March 2023 at 7pm – to be held online hosted by London Borough of Barnet.

10. **Any other urgent business**

As this was the final meeting of the Municipal Year, Councillor John Hart was thanked for his long service and support to the Welsh Harp, and the Committee joined the Chair in wishing him well in his retirement.

The meeting closed at Time Not Specified

Councillor Anne Clarke
Chair

The meeting closed at Time Not Specified

COUNCILLOR R MASHARI
Chair