

MINUTES OF THE WELSH HARP JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Thursday 4th March 2021 at 7.00 pm

Members Present:

Councillor John Hart	London Borough of Barnet
Councillor Roxanne Mashari	London Borough of Brent
Councillor Helene Richman	London Borough of Barnet
Councillor Anne Clarke	London Borough of Barnet
Councillor Nagus Narenthira	London Borough of Barnet
Councillor Parvez Ahmed	London Borough of Brent
Matthew Gunyon	Greenspaces & Leisure
Leslie Williams	Parks Service, Regeneration & Environ.
Peter Eros	Cleaner Earth UK
Derrick Chung	West Hendon Residents' Association
Lucy Shuker	Brent River Catchment Partnership
Neil Earnshaw	Canal and River Trust
Dale Langdale	Hendon Rifle Club
Dianne Murphy	London Wildlife Trust
John Shepherd	Welsh Harp Sailing Association
Judy Shepherd	West Hendon Community Forum
Liz Hall	West Hendon Allotment Society
Geoffrey Johnson	Woolmead Residents' Association
Andrew Haynes	Welsh Harp Conservation Group
Phil Atkinson	Phoenix Canoe Club
David Johnson	Environment Agency
Louise Crothall	Natural England
Leo Batten	Welsh Harp Conversation Group

1. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

It was noted that the application to the Green Recovery fund was unsuccessful but a second attempt to access the grant would be made.

Peter Eros offered suitable methods to tackle the Japanese Knotweed which would be shared with Officers following the meeting.

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 November 2020 were approved as a correct record.

2. Absence of Members

Apologies for absence were received from Roy Beddard and Maria Bailey.

3. Disclosable Pecuniary interests and Non-Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations made within the current agenda.

The Chairman paid tribute to the late Mrs Julie Johnson who had been a prominent member of the Committee and offered his condolences to Mr Geoffrey Johnson on behalf of the Committee.

4. Report of the Monitoring Officer

None.

4a. Proposed Work Updates

Nathan Smith provided an update to the proposed works since the last meeting. The project had been completed subject to minor works and photos were shown at the

meeting. It was noted that works for a new amenity area close to the water next to the bridge had been completed as part of the s.106 planning obligation.

Barratt London, West Hendon Partnership Board and the Canal River Trust (CRT) had consulted on the design and proposed works of the four amenity areas and tree reduction projects.

Logs from the tree reduction project have been used to create an insect habitat in agreement with Natural England and coir rolls would be installed in line with guidance from the CRT. A comprehensive litter pick of the area had also been completed.

A member of the Welsh Harp Conservation Group raised an issue regarding the stretch of willows which acted as a screen to reduce visual disturbance for the water birds on the reservoir and enquired about the height of reeds to be planted. Nathan Smith confirmed that input and full agreement of relevant parties had been presented to the Committee before implementation. The height of the reeds was to be confirmed. Natural England confirmed that there were sufficient screens and protection in the area.

A new knee height timber fence was to be replaced between the water and the amenity area which would be managed by First Port Limited, the estate manager of West Hendon along with the litter bins. It was noted that rough sleepers could be a major contributor to rubbish being dumped in the Welsh Harp. Residents were disputing the increased service charges imposed for littering and fly tipping.

Councillor Mashari commended volunteers for their efforts in rubbish clearance from the SSSI and surrounding areas and recommended that threatening letters from First Port Management be stopped. Councillor Richman offered to work with residents and volunteers to come up with a suitable resolution with First Port in relation to the unwarranted charges.

Members suggested that the log pile stacked up near the water should be left at a safe distance to prevent them from falling in the water.

5. Actions for Current Issues and Future Vision

Matthew Gunyon provided an update on the current situation and future works to be carried out at the reservoir following discussions with Brent, the Canal River Trust, London Wildlife Trust, Thames 21, and the Greater London Authority (GLA). Mr Gunyon thanked volunteers for the thousands of bags of litter that had been collected. The Environment Agency (EA) reported that litter clearance was carried out on a weekly basis.

MP Matthew Offord contacted the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on the issue of trash screens and received a response which Mr Gunyon would forward to the Committee post meeting.

It was noted that there had been no clear strategic plan for match funding or capital revenue to improve the area. Habitat management issues particularly on the Barnet side needed improvement. Invasion species and Japanese Knotweed were treated on a cyclical basis, but clear tracking was needed to reduce rising issues.

It was noted that a strategic and joined up approach on improvement to the Welsh Harp was needed. Therefore, development of a Welsh Harp Vision would include a review of the management plan and identification of key work streams such as

unified signage for the whole site, target dredging and access points to the Welsh Harp that could be easily identified as the SSSI area. A contractor specialist would be procured to help develop the master plan to improve work streams. In addition to the s.106 money that was available, funding from the GLA of £10,000 would be put towards the project combined with another £10,000 from Barnet.

The Chairman raised the issue of de-silting to ensure prevention of solidification and whether it had been taken into consideration. It was noted that although dredging of the whole reservoir was needed, the lack of funding meant that targeted dredging would be carried out as an interim measure. Innovative approaches were being explored to reduce organic matter within the sediments and sectioned off areas could potentially be drained to allow targeted dredges. A catchment wide approach was being done to look at preventative measures upstream of siltation.

Members recommended trash traps to be placed up river to collect silt and mud and the possibility of implementing another trash trap near the Brent Cross. Trash traps could also be modified to catch a wider area of rubbish flowing through especially during heavy rainfall.

Councillor Clarke informed the committee that the above suggestions were discussed by the Brent Cross team to include in their plan which was no longer funded by the shopping centre. Reporting from the local consultation exercise would be an open and transparent process and a vision would be developed in consideration of input from all parties.

Matthew Gunyon went through the plan on upcoming works in further detail. Some of the activities included:

- Supporting community clean-up: Materials and equipment would be provided through coordinated efforts with Brent Council and the CRT.
- Installation of additional safety signage: To ensure a balance between welcoming and educational signs.
- Installation of Recycling bins: Two bins were recently installed.
- Manage rough sleeping: An ongoing issue tackled by the rough sleeper team in Barnet to ensure rubbish was collected when possible and suitable accommodation provided.
- Manage invasive plant species: Cyclical treatment of Japanese Knotweed through stem injection or spraying. Additional patches were treated when identified and were being tracked. Volunteers were encouraged to assist with the Himalayan Balsam.
- Improvements projects for the reservoir: Consultation on dredging the water bed, improving access and view points were part of the long-term plan.
- Waste Management Plan working with EA: Forming localised waste lines with local environment agency, local businesses, and communities to address littering and fly tipping using a catchment wide approach.

6. London Borough of Brent Welsh Harp Management Plan

Leslie Williams informed the committee that Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) were in place to tackle issues including gatherings that would pose health and safety hazards. Brent Council had limited personnel to cover park enforcement but worked closely with services to tackle issues. Members were encouraged to raise any issues with the council directly, so that resources could be deployed accordingly. Police Officers were suggested to be involved where possible.

7. London Borough of Barnet Welsh Harp Management Plan

This item was covered under item 5.

8. Welsh Harp Waste Crisis

Ben Watt, musician, writer, and bird watcher presented a piece in relation to the crisis of the Welsh Harp. Mr Watt had been campaigning to improve conditions at the harp. The lowering of water levels in January revealed unsightly rubbish and a deeply rooted crisis.

All land owners including Barnet and Brent Councils, the Canal River Trust, the Environment Agency and Natural England were facing a number of rising issues and other factors including pollution. Rubbish from the in flowing rivers, Dollis Brook and Silk Streams, were having a negative impact on water quality, animal and plant species. Intervention was considered inadequate as seen in photos taken. It was noted that the management of the wetlands was part of CRT's statutory duty.

The decades of silt build up was toxic and whilst key parts of the reservoir had been dredged, selected parts of the reservoir needed to be dredged to protect natural habitats which have been said to be off limits.

The EA said that they cleared the traps weekly which did not seem to be the case, according to members of the committee. Without proper tools and manpower, a large island of silt and branches were left in the trapped filling the trap again within a week. Surface oil collection and petrol inceptors in the drain needed to be investigated further as well as the debris left down stream.

The odour of chemical residue had continued to linger in affected areas of the woodlands because of the paint factory fire in 2018. It had been revealed that Barnet Council had no bio diversity plan, ecologist intervention or park enforcement for the onshore area.

The lack of accurate mapping meant that there was no systematic management of invasive species like giant Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam, Crack Willow or other SSSI plant species.

There was a central environmental crisis with staggering amounts of discarded plastic, toxic silt, water airborne contaminants, gunk waste and inaccurate mapping of species which were all detrimental to the SSSI and which had not been addressed appropriately.

Mr Watt recommended that the CRT reassess their current Welsh Harp plan and devise a long term intensive clean up programme for both offshore and shore line plastic pollution.

Selected dredging around the wetlands was required to make use of responsible habitat management, mend broken breeding rafts and work with the EA to improve water quality.

A transcript of the waste crisis report and photos could be found via the following link:
<http://benwatt.com/play/article/the-slow-death-of-welsh-harp-crisis-update>

Councillor Clarke pointed out that Barnet Council needed to declare a climate emergency and imminent change was needed.

Andrew Smith from Natural England intended to respond to the distressing issues raised at the meeting with appropriate resources.

The dates of the next meetings have been scheduled for 28 July 2021 and 17 November 2021.

9. Any Other Business

None.

10. Any Other Items that the Chairman Decides are Urgent

None.

The meeting finished at 8.50 pm