

Dear Phill

I am writing on behalf of Cool Oak, a new environmental pressure group I founded last month following a year of campaigning in a loose local alliance for the welfare of Brent Reservoir (Welsh Harp). We have moved the dial in many areas. Canal and River Trust are now spending more than £100k on restoration works for the first time in decades. We also hosted a visit from Natural England's Tony Juniper this month to appraise him of all issues facing this historic SSSI.

I want to ask some questions regarding the Plan Alignment and Construction Method Statement (Feb 2018) for Barratt's' proposed Silk Stream Footbridge at West Hendon, and how it affects the SSSI in the area.

As you may or may not be aware, I published a report about the Silk Stream Bridge independently in September 2021, which is now posted on our new website here [<https://www.cooloakgroup.com/ourcampaigns/silk-stream-bridge>]. It was circulated among many councillors, stakeholders and interested parties at the time, and has generated interest locally and online.

It contends that the full story of the area through which the bridge will pass was not properly represented at the time when the planning application was submitted and determined. In short, the area was depicted as woodland and wet woodland, when - while that is how it largely presents today - it is in fact an overgrown mosaic of wetland habitats last re-profiled in the late 80s for the benefit of breeding birds of open water fringe protected under the SSSI citation of 1950 (re-notified in 1985); and it is only lack of stewardship that has seen its wet woodland colonisation and over-silting in the thirty years since. Prior to that it was also wetlands, being part of the northern arm of the reservoir which stretches right up to the Halford's warehouse on the A5.

It seems you even acknowledge the area is still part of the reservoir when you say in your CMS: "The new proposed pedestrian bridge consists of steel pored piles, reinforced concrete piers on both banks of the reservoir ... "

Your CMS also reiterates at several points the avoidance of the wetted channel during construction. My first question is how Barratt's propose to 'avoid the wetted channel' with the piling procedure as promised in the CMS, when most of the area - away from the narrow Silk Stream wetted channel itself - has many pockets and stretches of further wetted channel (canals, ponds, diverted waters of the Silk Stream, and a lagoon) from the last re-profiling. I attach pictures showing the

wetlands as dug in the 1980s and an aerial photo from a few years later. Further pictures are in my report. I understand the compulsory purchase of the strip of land that makes up the work area would appear to leave little room for manoeuvre. I also understand land agreements have been made for each of the piers and substructure. Can you explain therefore, how you will achieve the piling without having to issue an amendment that avoids wetted channel as promised, even if this means readdressing the land purchase?

You also say in the CMS: "The pile installation will progress from each bank working towards the wetted channel", when it appears you will be working in areas of wetted channel most of the way across. Where do you contend the wetted channel begins and ends?

You also say "Some levelling may be required" to allow for the timber mat that will support the crawler crane. Does this mean flattening islands and landscape features created for the sole purpose of creating a habitat for the breeding birds protected under the SSSI citation?

Can you also explain how a crawler crane lifting 12m concrete bridge spans and support vehicles, all on a timber mat, will be adequately supported on an area in part made up of wetted channel, thick silt, overgrown ponds, lagoon and canals?

Most fundamentally, can you explain whether and if so how the detailed construction of the bridge will be fully consistent with the approved plans and the parameters of the planning permission that has been granted, despite the fact that (contrary to what was anticipated at the time) it will be constructed on the wetted channel as explained above. Or will an amendment be required?

And finally, given the publication of my report and the archive photos of the wetlands connected to it, does Barratt's now accept the area through which the bridge will pass is more than just the littered wet woodland depicted at planning, and is in fact a neglected SSSI wetlands that was overlooked, or at best downplayed at planning? And does Barratt's realise now that Natural England have been made aware of this, it could severely impact on ecological mitigation demands made of Barratt's before a spade goes in the ground?

I look forward to your answers

Best,
Ben

Ben Watt

Cool Oak

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Reversing decades of neglect at
Brent Reservoir (Welsh Harp)

IMAGES:

1. LOOKING FROM WETLANDS TO BOWLING GREEN CLUBHOUSE CLOSE TO WHERE
SILK STREAM BRIDGE WILL LAND (below)



2. LOOKING FROM WETLANDS TO BOWLING GREEN CLUBHOUSE CLOSE TO WHERE SILK STREAM BRIDGE WILL LAND (below)



3. LOOKING FROM BANK ABOVE WEST HENDON PLAYING FIELDS CAR PARK, WHERE NEW SILK STREAM BRIDGE WILL LAND (below)



4. LOOKING FROM WETLANDS TOWARDS HALFORD'S WAREHOUSE, OVER WHICH THE SILK STREAM BRIDGE WILL PASS (below)



5. AERIAL PHOTO OF NORTH MARSH WETLANDS SHOWING OPEN WATER STRETCHING TO HALFORD'S (below)



6. SUPERIMPOSITION OF SILK STREAM BRIDGE ROUTE ACROSS WETLANDS. (CORNER OF HALFORD'S WAREHOUSE JUST VISIBLE.)
(below)

