



## LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

### MINUTES OF THE WELSH HARP JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE Hosted as an online meeting (via MS Teams) by Brent Council on Monday 24 November 2025 at 6.00 pm

#### PRESENT:

##### Councillors:

Councillor Krupa Sheth	London Borough Brent – Chair
Councillor Rishikesh Chakraborty	London Borough Barnet – Vice Chair
Councillor Alan Schneiderman	London Borough Barnet
Councillor Parvez Ahmed	London Borough Brent
Councillor Mary Mitchell	London Borough Brent
Councillor Arshad Mahmood	London Borough Brent

##### Organisations:

Ben Watt	Cool Oak Group
John & Judy Shepherd	Welsh Harp Sailing Association
Ben Macmillan	Canal River Trust
Leila Taheri	Friends of Welsh Harp
Dianne Murphy	London Wildlife Trust.
Phil Atkinson	Phoenix Canoe Club
Lewis Elmes	Environment Agency
Hannah Reid	Thames 21
Manfred Starkl	Welsh Harp Sailing Association

Officers: Matthew Gunyon (LB Barnet Head of Greenspaces & Trees), Leslie Williams (LB Brent Project Officer), Harriet Duffield (LB Barnet Biodiversity and Conservation Officer), Chris Whyte (LB Brent Director Public Realm), Rosie Whicheloe (LB Brent Principal Ecology Officer), Sheri Odoffin (LB Barnet Senior Project Manager), Kelly Eaton (Head of Parks and Green Infrastructure) & James Kinsella (LB Brent Governance & Scrutiny Manager) and Rebecca Reid (LB Brent Governance Officer)

#### 1. Apologies for Absence and Clarification of Alternative Members

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ernest Ambe Esq (LB Barnet) and Councillor Bilbow (LB Barnet).

#### 2. Declarations of interests

There were no declarations of interests made during the meeting.

#### 3. Deputations

No deputations were received.

#### **4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous meetings held on Monday 21 July 2025 be approved as a correct record of the meeting.

#### **5. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

#### **6. London Borough of Barnet - Welsh Harp Management Plan**

Matthew Gunyon (LB Barnet Head of Greenspaces & Trees) was invited to introduce a report from the London Borough of Barnet on the Welsh Harp Management Plan. Members' attention was drawn to section 1.4 of the report concerning the West Hendon Playing Fields Master Plan. It was reported that Cabinet had approved the delivery of the Master Plan through a phased approach. The first phase would include the provision of a new playground, the refurbishment of existing tennis courts and the construction of a 3x3 basketball court. Installation of these facilities was expected in Spring 2026. The playground had been subject to a public consultation which had recently closed, and officers were reviewing the outcomes to update the design. Members were further advised that a future phase of the Master Plan related to the provision of a football pitch using plastic materials. This element remained at feasibility stage in collaboration with colleagues from the Football Foundation. If progressed, it would be subject to a planning application.

In referring to section 1.5 of the report, Matthew Gunyon provided an update on the Welsh Harp and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) management. Works had commenced on the North Marsh with site clearance, and the compound was based within West Hendon Playing Fields, utilising facilities there for waste removal. The Council was working with conservation volunteers to deliver a series of habitat management activities and sessions, which were taking place every Wednesday from 10am to 3pm throughout the winter.

Matthew Gunyon also updated members on the planning enforcement case relating to a property in Woolmead Avenue. Members were informed that a retrospective planning application had now been submitted and was progressing through the Council's planning process for consideration and review. In respect of the Silkstream Bridge, it was reported that colleagues from Barratt had provided an update. A workshop session had taken place in July 2025, followed by a further session in August 2025 with members. Barratt colleagues were continuing to work through the design process for the bridge, and a series of communications would be issued in the near future via newsletters and website updates.

The Chair thanked Matthew Gunyon for introducing the report and then moved on to invite questions and comments from the Committee in relation to the London Borough of Barnet - Welsh Harp Management Plan:

- As an initial query, Welsh Harp JCC members (via Microsoft Teams Chat) questioned whether officers had considered the environmental implications of using plastic materials for the proposed football pitch given its proximity to a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). In response, Matthew Gunyon (LB Barnet, Head of Greenspaces and Trees) confirmed that the use of plastics for the football pitch was being carefully considered in collaboration with the Football Foundation. It was explained that the Foundation had developed a series of measures to contain potential leakage and that the location of the pitch had been selected with regard to the nearby SSSI. It was further stated that these matters would be addressed during the feasibility, design and planning stages.

Concerns were expressed that consultation with the Football Foundation alone was insufficient and stressed the importance of involving independent environmental advisers given the sensitivity of the SSSI. In response, Matthew Gunyon clarified that consultants were working alongside the Football Foundation, which was a partner in the programme should the project proceed to funding and planning application stages. It was also noted that the Foundation had extensive experience in delivering such facilities and worked with a range of designers and providers. It was confirmed that consultees, including Natural England and others, would be engaged as the process advanced.

- Details were sought on whether residents had been involved in the workshops concerning the proposed Silkstream Bridge. In response, Matthew Gunyon confirmed that the workshops had involved councillors and colleagues from Barnet's Regeneration team. Following on from the previous question, members questioned whether there were plans to involve residents in decisions around the Silk Stream Bridge affecting them. In response, Sheri Odoffin (LB Barnet, Senior Project Manager) explained that the planning application for the Silkstream Bridge had been approved several years ago as part of the West Hendon regeneration estate proposals. It was confirmed that residents had been consulted during that process and that once planning permission was granted, further approval was not required. However, it was emphasised that ongoing engagement remained important and that stakeholder engagement had commenced, including statutory organisations. It was further added that Barratt intended to roll out its Engagement Strategy to share information with the community. Matthew Gunyon provided further clarification that the West Hendon development referred to the housing scheme on the West Hendon estate and not to the West Hendon Playing Fields Master Plan.
- Further concerns were expressed by a member that despite being a resident for several years and actively involved in the Welsh Harp community, they had never been consulted on the bridge plans. It was further noted that many new residents were also unaware of the proposed Silkstream Bridge.

As no further issues were raised at this stage of the meeting the Chair thanked officers and Welsh Harp JCC members for their contributions and it was **AGREED** to note the update provided.

## 7. London Borough of Brent - Welsh Harp Management Plan

Leslie Williams (LB Brent Project Officer) was then invited to introduce a report from the London Borough of Brent on the Welsh Harp Management Plan. An update was provided on the Welsh Harp Vision. Members heard that officers from Barnet, Brent and other partner organisations had met recently to discuss progress and interpretation initiatives. It was noted that several small innovations had been made, some of which were reflected in later agenda items.

In reporting on marshland restoration work at Neasden Recreation Ground on the southern edge of the reservoir, Leslie Williams confirmed that this work had been undertaken in partnership with the Canal and River Trust, the Conservation Volunteers and the Sailing Association. It was additionally stated that good progress had been achieved, including works completed at the end of Winter in February 2025 and further works undertaken during Autumn 2025. Approximately 150 metres of marshland had been partially restored, and steady progress was continuing.

An update was also provided on the Welsh Harp Centre, now known as the Welsh Harp Education Centre. It was explained that the centre would provide opportunities for young people aged 16 and above with special educational needs and disabilities during term time, with provision for community use at other times. The programme for young people would focus on developing vocational skills, including horticulture, and preparing Brent's young people for adulthood. It was confirmed that the building programme had reached stage 2 design, which had been approved by Brent Council's project team. A pre-application meeting had taken place with the local planning authority to outline the current design and obtain feedback. Recruitment was underway for a staff member within Brent Council's Children, Young People and Community Development team to oversee the Welsh Harp Centre, including curriculum development and liaison with community groups. It was expected that the post holder would commence in January 2026. In the interim, discussions were ongoing regarding short-term use of the buildings.

It was further reported that Barnet and Brent Councils had hosted events at the Welsh Harp Open Space to address invasive species. These events had included learning from other London organisations about species control and had been considered highly valuable. Members were further advised that the Canal and River Trust had submitted an application to undertake investigatory work on the dam wall, requiring access across Neasden Recreation Ground. This work was now scheduled for January and February 2026, revised from the previously anticipated timing of November and December 2025. It was also confirmed that Brent Council's Parks Service was preparing interpretative maps for entrances to Welsh Harp Park currently without maps. In addition, the Canal and River Trust were developing interpretation signage for its designated locations at the reservoir. Brent Council's Parks Service was also investigating the reduction of scrub around the interpretative point at Welsh Harp Open Space to reopen views towards the reservoir.

In continuing the presentation of the report, Rosie Whicheloe (LB Brent Principal Ecology Officer) provided an update on the biodiversity habitat land bank. It was explained that the land bank was linked to new legislation on Biodiversity Net Gain and aimed to enhance habitat within Neasden Recreation Ground. It was confirmed that the project was at an early stage and had secured Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) funding for a feasibility study. Initial findings were expected

early in the following year. It was emphasised that the purpose of the initiative was to retain habitat within the borough. The project sought to maintain nature, biodiversity and vegetation locally.

The Chair thanked Leslie Williams and Rosie Whicheloe for introducing the report and then moved on to invite questions and comments from the Committee in relation to the London Borough of Brent - Welsh Harp Management Plan:

- Welsh Harp JCC members queried whether enabling access via Neasden Recreation Ground for the Canal and River Trust and its contractors to conduct tests on the dam wall infrastructure would involve any dewatering of the Welsh Harp. In response, Leslie Williams (LB Brent Project Officer) confirmed that the works did not involve dewatering and explained that the investigations related to the dam wall structure itself. It was noted that the Canal and River Trust could provide further details. In considering the response, Manfred Starkl (Welsh Harp Sailing Association) observed that the Canal and River Trust and its contractors had already commenced drilling into the dam and were undertaking investigative works. He reported that water levels had been maintained during these activities. It was additionally stated that the works had been ongoing for approximately one week.

As no further issues were raised at this stage of the meeting the Chair thanked officers and Welsh Harp JCC members for their contributions and it was **AGREED** to note the update provided.

## **8. Update from the Canal & River Trust**

Ben Macmillan (Canal River Trust) was invited to provide an update on from the Canal & River Trust. In presenting, details were provided on the ongoing restoration works within the north marsh of the Welsh Harp, which had commenced in late October 2025. It was reported that the works were progressing well. Detailed presentation slides were shared with the Committee, including photographs illustrating the current state of the restoration. It was confirmed that contractors on site had provided positive feedback regarding the project.

The Chair thanked Ben Macmillan for the update and then moved on to invite questions and comments from the Committee in relation to the information provided.

As no specific questions were raised in relation to the update provided by the Canal and River Trust, a member took the opportunity to raise points connected to the update provided by Barnet under item 6 above, with the following being noted:

- In referring to earlier comments made, a member expressed concern that the scope of the West Hendon Playing Fields project had changed significantly and noted that consultation with residents had taken place a decade ago. The member emphasised that this was a public forum and that such matters should be discussed openly. In response, Matthew Gunyon (LB Barnet Head of Greenspaces & Trees) acknowledged the concerns raised and confirmed that the matter related to two separate projects: the West Hendon Playing Fields Master Plan and the West Hendon Estate. It was further stated that coordination

would take place between his team, which was responsible for the playing fields, and Sheri Odoffin's contacts with Barratt regarding the Silkstream Bridge.

## **9. Date of Future Meetings**

RESOLVED that the following date for future meetings of the Joint Consultative Committee, scheduled to be held online and hosted by LB Brent, be noted:

- Thursday 19 March 2026 at 6pm

## **10. Any Other Business**

### **10.1 Thames 21: Update on Community Group Activities**

Hannah Reid (Thames 21) was invited to introduce an item and provided an overview of community group activities. In presenting to the Committee, it was acknowledged that a significant amount of work was undertaken beyond the programmes delivered by the Council and the Canal and River Trust, including contributions from volunteer groups and initiatives led by the Brent Catchment Partnership. It was highlighted that receiving updates on water quality monitoring programmes relevant to the Welsh Harp may be of interest to the Committee. Hannah Reid proposed the introduction of a standing agenda item led by the Brent Catchment Partnership to present updates on community activities and invited feedback from volunteer and community groups attending the meeting on whether they would support this approach and whether they would be willing for the Partnership to coordinate and prepare a written report for inclusion in future agendas.

The Chair thanked Hannah Reid for the update and then moved on to invite questions and comments from the Committee in relation to the information provided, with the following being noted:

- A member, representing Friends of the Welsh Harp, thanked Hannah Reid for acknowledging the contribution of volunteer groups and the significant time and effort invested over the past decade. The member expressed a desire for volunteer groups to be taken seriously and for their work to be recognised appropriately, noting that volunteers dedicated time and energy outside of their full-time employment.
- An additional member emphasised the importance of addressing water quality at these meetings and noted that sailing activities took place throughout the week, including sessions involving children, and stressed the need for regular updates on water quality and on measures taken by Barnet to manage pollution entering the Welsh Harp.

In concluding the presentation of the proposal to the Committee, Hannah Reid (Thames 21) recommended that data collected through the Brent Catchment Partnership be compiled into a report for future meetings and suggested emailing community groups to request updates on actions undertaken during the previous three months, which would then be incorporated into the report for inclusion in the agenda.

The Committee welcomed this proposal and agreed that it would enhance engagement with community stakeholders. As a result of the outcome of the discussion, the following recommendation identified was **AGREED** that a standing item titled 'Update on Community Group Activities', to be led by the Brent Catchment Partnership, be added to future agendas.

#### 10.2 Cool Oak and Welsh Harp Conservation Group: Summary of views on the CRT Restoration project and Silk Stream Bridge Proposal

Ben Watt (Cool Oak Group) was invited to introduce an item summarising the views of Cool Oak and the Welsh Harp Conservation Group regarding the Canal and River Trust (CRT) Restoration Project and the Silk Stream Bridge proposal. In presenting, it was highlighted that two contrasting developments were currently taking place on the North Marsh at the Welsh Harp. It was reported that, following a proposal submitted by Cool Oak Group in 2022, the Canal and River Trust had commenced restoration works on a substantial area in the north-western corner of the site, approximately equivalent to the size of two football pitches. This area formed a key part of the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which it was felt had been neglected for over 30 years since the last significant restoration works. It was noted that this work had been possible due to £500k worth of funding secured via the Canal and River Trust to deliver the works. Upon completion, the restoration would revitalise a large section of wetland, representing a significant improvement for a previously deteriorated area. Both the Cool Oak Group and the Welsh Harp Conservation Group commended the Canal and River Trust for progressing this initiative, which was described as transformational and an example of appropriate stewardship of an SSSI.

By contrast, Ben Watt highlighted concerns regarding the proposed Silk Stream Bridge on the north-eastern side of the North Marsh, situated approximately 100 metres from the restoration site. It was reported that Barratt London had recently informed local residents that construction of the bridge was unlikely to commence before the end of 2026. It was noted that the bridge was intended to be a private structure for public use, with Barratt London funding the initial build. However, the potential for ongoing maintenance costs to be charged to Hendon Woodside residents through their service charges was also highlighted as a concern with residents already contributing to the upkeep of the Cool Oak Lane footbridge.

Concern was expressed that the new bridge would present significant engineering challenges, given its proposed length of approximately 200 metres across wet silt and marshland. Ben Watt warned that, should Barratt complete the construction, the maintenance costs for residents would be considerable and potentially unaffordable for many households, particularly in the context of the current cost-of-living pressures. Ben Watt further observed that Barnet Council had promoted the bridge as a symbol of regeneration and connectivity. However, it was argued that the practical benefits had diminished significantly. It was felt that the £18 million redevelopment of the adjacent playing fields had been reduced to a limited scheme comprising a small number of tennis courts, a playground and drainage improvements. The primary school originally planned for the estate, which would have utilised the bridge, was no longer scheduled for construction. Consequently, Ben Watt felt that the bridge was likely to be underused and represented poor value for residents. Additional concerns were raised regarding safety and environmental impact. It was stated that the bridge

would create opportunities for anti-social behaviour, vandalism, fly-tipping and other issues. It was noted that the planning proposal had described the bridge as a 'treetop walk', despite the fact that local trees were predominantly crack willow rooted in unstable marshland, which frequently collapsed. It was emphasised that the project would cause irreversible harm to the north-eastern section of the SSSI, which supported numerous protected species. This was contrasted with the restoration works on the north-western side, which were enhancing habitats and biodiversity.

In concluding the presentation, Ben Watt summarised that the Council possessed statutory powers to cancel the project and could renegotiate contracts and legal agreements if necessary. He contended that the bridge offered minimal practical benefit, prioritised developer-led regeneration over genuine community need, and risked generating political opposition. Ben Watt therefore urged the Council to consider the wider community interests and ensure these took precedence.

The Chair thanked Ben Watt for his presentation and then moved on to invite questions and comments from the Committee in relation to the information provided, with the following being noted:

- In addressing the comments made during the presentation to the Committee, Councillor Schneiderman stated that it was unfair to suggest that he had opposed restoration works on the North Marsh. It was clarified that funding constraints affected numerous projects across the Council and that this did not imply a lack of support for the restoration works, which were in fact part-funded by the Council through a section 106 agreement.

In relation to the proposed Silk Stream Bridge, Councillor Schneiderman noted that the matter had been discussed extensively by the Committee and confirmed that the bridge had received planning approval some time ago. It was noted that Barratt intended to proceed with construction and had the authority to do so. It was acknowledged that the process had taken longer than anticipated but confirmed that Barratt's ecologist would need to engage with stakeholders to explain the potential impact and the mitigation measures in place to ensure that the bridge could be constructed without compromising the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Councillor Schneiderman expressed the hope that a meeting would be arranged in the near future to enable members and member organisations on the Committee to raise concerns directly with Barratt's ecologists and to receive responses. It was further noted that the West Hendon development plans were being delivered in phases and would not proceed at the scale originally envisaged.

- A member of the Welsh Harp JCC queried whether the development of the proposed Silk Stream Bridge was a finalised decision. In response, Matthew Gunyon (LB Barnet, Head of Greenspaces and Trees) confirmed that the planning application had been approved several years ago enabling construction to proceed.
- An additional member of the Welsh Harp JCC expressed the view that circumstances had changed since the original decision and suggested that Barnet Council could relieve Barratt of the obligation to construct the bridge in

light of new information. The member highlighted concerns regarding the environmental impact, the perceived lack of amenity value and the potential financial burden on residents. It was suggested that Barnet Council should acknowledge that the bridge may have appeared beneficial at the time of approval, but that a review was now warranted.

- In noting that discussions regarding the bridge had been ongoing for many years, a member recalled objecting to the proposal from the outset, primarily due to its impact on wildlife. The member stated that an alternative route had previously been considered but rejected. It was understood that the bridge had originally been justified by the need to provide access for a proposed school adjacent to the playing fields; however, as the school was no longer part of the development, the member argued that the necessity for the bridge should be reassessed. The member also noted that the bridge had not been initiated by Barratt but had been imposed as a planning obligation, which should now be reviewed by Barnet Council.
- A further member emphasised the strength of local opposition and reported that residents had been promised a meeting to discuss the proposal, which had not yet taken place. The member urged that such a meeting be arranged to allow residents to express their views. Welsh Harp JCC members further stated that residents were strongly opposed to the bridge and were concerned about the financial implications, particularly in relation to service charges. Members reported that residents were unaware of existing contributions towards the maintenance of the Cool Oak Lane footbridge and expressed concern that similar costs would apply to the new bridge with the construction of the bridge highlighted as a condition originated from Barnet Council.
- In considering the earlier comments raised by members, Sheri Odoffin (LB Barnet, Senior Project Manager) noted that she was present at this meeting to ensure that feedback was conveyed to Barratt. It was confirmed that Barratt intended to provide opportunities for views to be heard and explained that regeneration schemes were complex and long-term. It was additionally noted that decisions made at a specific point may often be implemented at a later date, which could result in changes to the make-up of the local community. It was emphasised that while decisions could not always be revisited, there would be opportunities to engage on the delivery of the project. The need to respect statutory authorities was highlighted, such as Natural England and Barnet Council's ecologists, who were responsible for safeguarding the natural environment, while also recognising community concerns. It was further stated that Barratt was operating in a challenging economic climate and would not proceed with the bridge if it were not viable with the bridge recognised as a significant commitment.
- Welsh Harp JCC members expressed further concern regarding the involvement of Natural England, stating that their engagement had been limited and that objections had been raised at the time of the original proposal with the bridge no longer felt to be justified, given its environmental impact, financial cost and reduced amenity value. It was asserted that the Council retained statutory powers to halt or amend the project and urged reconsideration.

- In summarising, a Welsh Harp JCC member concluded by stressing the importance of enabling members and member organisations of the Committee to present their concerns directly to Barratt's ecologists and to receive responses.

In seeking to bring consideration of the item to a close, the Chair thanked officers and Welsh Harp JCC members for their contributions towards consideration of the matter.

As a result of the outcome of the discussion, it was **AGREED** that the request for Barratt to provide an opportunity for members and member organisations to express their views regarding the proposed Silk Stream Bridge be referred back for consideration and action.

The meeting closed at 6:52PM.

COUNCILLOR KRUPA SHETH  
Chair