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2nd August 2013

Boris Johnson
Mayor of London
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
More London
LONDON SE1 2AA

Dear Mayor Johnson,

West Hendon Estate, Barnet (planning reference: H/01054/13)

I write as chair, and on behalf of, the Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee, which includes elected councillors from both Brent and Barnet and is a cross party body. Our charter is to consider and co-ordinate all the interests of recreation, leisure, maintenance and nature conservation together with the statutory requirements of the Canal and River Trust and the Environment Agency at the Welsh Harp (Brent Reservoir) Our resulting objective is to protect the Welsh Harp Reservoir and surrounding open land as a unique environment for both recreation and wildlife conservation.

At our last meeting on the 24th July 2013, the committee noted with considerable disappointment and concern that the London Borough of Barnet Planning and Environment Committee had granted planning permission to the redevelopment of the West Hendon Estate. It was agreed that we would write to you to express our objections to the scheme as it is currently proposed.

Our grounds for objection are based on the environmental impact of the scheme and are therefore in line with our remit.

SSSI endangerment

The Welsh Harp – also known as the Brent Reservoir – is a nature reserve and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). As one of only approximately thirty-six SSSIs across London, the area is of considerable value not only locally but also London wide and nationally. Both the London and Barnet Plans contain directives regarding the protection of SSSIs. This scheme clearly breaches those directives.

The proposed development will cause considerable disruption and therefore harm to the wildlife of the SSSI. This disruption will be caused by the process of construction, the size and scale of the development, the resulting increase in population density, together with light and noise pollution.

We have grave concerns that allowing such a scheme will create a precedent and endanger similar areas in the capital and beyond.

Risk to flora and fauna

We wish to highlight that one of the proposed pedestrian bridges would span the wetland breeding grounds on the SSSI and it would be impossible for this to not negatively impact the birds nesting in the area, both during construction and afterwards when in use. Migratory birds using the area include Gadwalls and Widgeon and it is known that there is a colony of Daubenton Bats roosting in the area.

Some of the buildings will be 29 storeys in height. This will impact on the bird population, especially as they are a mere 20 metres from the water's edge. A particular issue is the effect this will have on wind currents which could cause birds to fly into buildings or become confused and be displaced. There has been no mention of this issue in the application for the scheme.

Inadequate assessments and safeguards

We consider that the wildlife assessments which have been undertaken are lacking, and are deeply concerned that the proposals for the scheme make no specific mention of the reservoir or of flora and fauna.

The committee also noted the views of Natural England which were reported as advising that construction should not go ahead either in summer or winter due to the disruption that would be caused to birds. We are aware that Natural England has also supported the appointment of an SSSI Warden to monitor the impact of the scheme on the SSSI. However, very little detail has been provided regarding the powers of this post and the funding provided is considered insufficient by the committee.

In summary, therefore, we believe that the scheme as currently designed presents a grave risk to the status and environment of one of the very few wild spaces left in London. As a city, we cannot afford to risk endangering and damaging this priceless and very special place.

We urge you to direct the Local Planning Authority to refuse the application or failing that to act as the Local Planning Authority yourself so that the application can be considered fully in the light of all the appropriate development plan policies.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Alison Hopkins

*Chair Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee
Liberal Democrat councillor for Dollis Hill*