



Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee
14 November 2013

**Report from the Director of Environment and
Neighbourhood Services**

For Action

Wards Affected: ALL

Welsh Harp Management Plan

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report presents progress on the Brent Reservoir / Welsh Harp Management Plan. The Management Plan is jointly managed by the three main land-holding organisations: Brent Council, the London Borough of Barnet, and the Canal & River Trust (formerly British Waterways).

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the Report.

3.0 DETAILS

- 3.1 A copy of the Welsh Harp / Brent Reservoir Management Plan is available on the Brent Council website at
<http://www.brent.gov.uk/media/3207383/Brent-Reservoir-Management-Plan.pdf>
- 3.2 The Welsh Harp / Brent Reservoir Management Plan includes an Action Plan for the current year; and for this report, this is detached from the Management Plan and updated as Appendix 1. The 'Progress' column summarises current progress.
- 3.3 The construction of a Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) at Neasden Recreation Ground has been completed and is available for use by the local community. A hedgerow of *Rosa rugosa* will be planted in the autumn to compliment the existing plantings. Planning details are at:
<https://forms.brent.gov.uk/servlet/ep.ext?extId=101150&reference=109324&st=PL>
- 3.4 Brent Council Sports and Parks Service organises weekly leader-led Healthy Walks. The meeting point is at the Welsh Harp Open Space car park, Birchen Grove, every Thursday (except on Bank / Public Holidays) from 10am-11am. The walks are 'low to moderate' in pace. For details contact Brent Council Sports Service, tel: 020 8937 3707,
www.Brent.gov.uk/sports

- 3.5 Capital Ring: The Capital Ring is a round-London recreational walking route of about 70 miles and a section passes through the Welsh Harp. The walk can be walked in sections and stocks of the leaflets are available from Barnet, and Brent Councils. Information is also available at <http://www.walklondon.org.uk/route.asp>
- 3.6 Green Flag application. The Welsh Harp Open Space has successfully retained the Green Flag award following the annual inspection.
- 3.7 Brent Council's executive have agreed that Brent's public realm contract should be awarded to Veolia. This will mean that from September 2014 all Grounds maintenance works will be carried out under contract rather than in-house, as currently. At the Welsh Harp this will apply to the Welsh Harp Open Space including the car park, to Neasden Recreation Ground, and also to Silver Jubilee Park to the north.
- 3.8 At the July 2013 meeting, officers were asked to provide a briefing to the next meeting on the status of Otters within the Brent River and the potential for re-introducing Otters to the Brent Reservoir. A summary is provided here; and for more detail please refer to <http://a0768b4a8a31e106d8b0-50dc802554eb38a24458b98ff72d550b.r19.cf3.rackcdn.com/geho1010btdj-e-e.pdf>
- Populations of Otters have been monitored in England since 1977-79, following reductions in populations that continued into the 1970s. In 1977-79 Otters had been reduced to a presence of less than 6 % of watercourse sites in England; largely confined to sites in south-west England, along the Welsh Borders and with a few fragmented populations in East Anglia and northern England. By 1984-86 the presence had increased to 10%, to 23% in 1991-1994, 36% in 2001-02 and to 59% in 2009-10. Otters have now increased their populations in the upper part of the Thames catchment and are re-colonising eastwards. Otter populations have reached Oxford, and their presence has been observed towards Windsor. They have not yet reached the Brent catchment, but have reached, in small numbers, the Small River Lea near Cheshunt and the River Colne near Uxbridge. The increase in England is attributed to the reduction in toxic pesticides, improved water quality; and consequential increases in fish stocks. Otters are generally shy of proximity with Humans, but some have colonised urban areas. They are unlikely to affect water sports.
- 3.9 The requirement of the Water Framework Directive to bring all watercourses up to good ecological status involves a wide range of partners including the water companies, Environment Agency, local authorities, environmental groups and users of watercourses. The Brent River Catchment Partnership brings together the main partners for the River Brent. If the habitat of the Brent catchment can be improved, particularly by improving water quality; by removing physical obstacles to fish movement along the river, and by improving marginal habitat, then according to the authorities of the recent report, there is a possibility of re-colonisation of the River Brent within the next twenty years. Officers are however of the view that it may be premature to use resources to construct an artificial holt for otters since the nearest viable populations are still some distance from urban London. Rather the priority should be to improve the water quality and river habitat.
- 3.10 The status of Kingfishers at the Brent Reservoir was also raised at the July meeting. The Welsh Harp Conservation Group can probably provide an update. However, Kingfishers have remained present, albeit in low numbers, along stretches of the River Brent near to the Brent Reservoir. They can occasionally be seen at the Reservoir.

- 3.11 The Brent Catchment Partnership, the partnership of local authorities and others working to improve the River Brent and catchment have continued with projects to make best use of resources, for example for the control of invasive species, and encouraging design projects in the catchment that will help to restore the function of the river.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Brent Reservoir / Welsh Harp Management Plan is a long-term document and not all works are feasible in the short-term. Works listed in the management plan include the programmed operational works and longer-term works to maintain, restore and enhance the Welsh Harp area. Works are undertaken only where the budgets or resources are available. Programmed operational works are undertaken only within the existing budgets.
- 4.2 A significant amount of work is undertaken, or in kind, by the voluntary sector, and by the volunteers of the sailing clubs, conservation groups and other community organisations. In addition, the Council and partners, endeavour where feasible, to seek additional funding from grants and other sources.

5 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, land owners or occupiers, and also public bodies, are required to give notice to and consult with Natural England where they wish to carry out, or cause or permit to be carried out any operation in an area of land that is of special interest by reason of any of its flora, fauna, or geological or physiographical features (this requirement applies to operations within a SSSI, and to operations outside the SSSI that may affect the features of interest); and Natural England will issue consent, issue consent with conditions or refuse consent. Failing to follow this process is a criminal offence which may result in a fine and a restoration order. CROW (and section 28G of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981) places a duty on all public bodies to take reasonable steps, consistent with the proper exercise of the authority's functions, to further the conservation and enhancement of the site.
- 5.2 It is good practice for land owners or occupiers to produce Management Plans for the SSSI, which when approved by Natural England, enable the carrying out of the works specified in the Management Plan. This can reduce the administrative work inherent in obtaining consent for individual items of management work.
- 5.3 The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 requires that all public authorities in England and Wales have a general duty to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of their functions.

6 DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The proposals in this report have been subject to screening and officers believe that there are no diversity implications.

7 STAFFING / ACCOMMODATION IMPLICATIONS (IF APPROPRIATE)

7.1 None specific.

8.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The Welsh Harp Management Plan co-ordinates environmental works in the Reservoir area.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Dated correspondence and other documents referred to in the Report include:
Welsh Harp / Brent Reservoir Management Plan.

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