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Brent Cyclists
Secretary:
David Arditti

19 March 2010

Leslie Williams,
Parks Service
LB Brent

94 Stag Lane
Edgware
Middlesex
HA8 5LW

Dear Mr Williams,

This is a response from Brent Cyclists to the consultation on the Draft Welsh Harp Management Plan 2010.

Brent Cyclists is the local group of the London Cycling Campaign (LCC), the voice of cycling in London, and with over 10,000 members, the largest urban cycling organisation in the world. We have consulted our members on this subject and drawn on the accumulated expertise of the LCC.

We wish to comment on the subject of the Welsh Harp reservoir because of the importance for public recreation and leisure of the lands round the reservoir. Cycling should have a part in this, and, indeed, there are some sections of cycle routes in the Welsh Harp Open Space.

1. General objectives

We note that amongst the stated objectives in the plan are:

(2.8)

3 To improve access to the site – in particular for visitors with limited mobility
and

6 To promote appropriate recreation

We would wish to see far more emphasis on these objectives than has been the case heretofore, and particularly more accommodation for cycling. In reference to point 3, many visitors with limited mobility could cycle distances that they could not walk. Cycling is an excellent way for all types of people to gain access to the site in an environmentally-benign way, not requiring car-parking or creating more motor traffic on the already congested roads around the site. In reference to point 6, cycling is a highly appropriate recreation for this space that has little effect on wildlife or other features of the natural environment if sensibly accommodated, and would allow many more people to appreciate the beauties of the "secret gem" of the Welsh Harp Reservoir and lands.

The recent draft strategy for Brent Parks department placed an emphasis on encouraging cycling in parks. On page 16 it stated:

The government's emphasis on green travel has raised cycling onto the political agenda and meant that there is increasing amounts of funding for cycling projects. We continue

to improve cycle routes within the borough incorporating, where possible, parks and open spaces that are accessible after dark.

In addition, Brent has recently received funding from Transport for London to become a "Biking Borough", with an objective to raise the proportion of trips made by bike from the current 1% to 5% by 2015. At a meeting on 3 March 2010, the Leader of the Council, Paul Lorber, stated the council's desire to increase cycling across the borough, and the opinion that one of the main ways this could be achieved was through increasing cycle access to parks and open spaces. We see increasing cycling in open spaces as an essential complement to increasing cycling on the roads, as parks and open spaces are the places where children and inexperienced or unconfident adult cyclists can learn to cycle and gain confidence for cycling on the roads. In addition, people want to be able to cycle in pleasant open spaces away from noise, road danger and pollution. We recognise however that these desires need to be balanced against the needs of walkers and the needs to protect delicate natural environments and ecosystems.

2. The need for more connected paths and routes round the reservoir

The problem with utilising the open spaces around the Welsh Harp for cycling, and, indeed, walking, currently is that there are too few paths, they are not connected through the site in any kind of network, and the different open spaces around the reservoir are isolated from one another, only accessible separately, by journeys that mostly involve traveling on very major roads: the A5 Edgware Road, the A406 North Circular Road, and the A4088 Neasden Lane. The cut-up nature of the public lands round the reservoir and the fact that communication between them involves the unpleasant cycling and walking environments of these major strategic roads currently strangles the potential of the reservoir lands for public recreation. They are basically very under-used, as the Draft Plan acknowledges on p38 and elsewhere, because they are hard to access. The Draft Plan lays a stress on trying to improve usage of the site through signage, e.g. from bus stops and stations, and for motorists, but we do not really think signage will make much difference to usage while the lands around the reservoir remain so disconnected and fundamentally difficult to access by all forms of transport. It is the actual infrastructure which needs improving.

2a. A circular route

We draw attention to this important paragraph in the Draft Plan, p39:

The HLF steering group considered the access proposals in the 1994 management plan, and in particular the idea of a footpath all the way round the reservoir. After careful analysis and for two main reasons – cost of bridges across the Silk Stream and River Brent and disturbance to breeding wildfowl – it was decided not to pursue this proposal. Rather, paths away from sensitive ecological areas and linking easily to access points were given priority. In addition, as the route of the Capital RING, London Walking Forum's 72 mile circular walk around London, was planned to go along the northern shore, this gave added weight to this path in a regional network.

We very strongly feel that this whole subject needs to be revisited. The environmental agenda has totally changed since 1994. The advancement of global warming is the biggest threat to natural habitats and to wildlife. This is man-made, and local

communities must do as much as possible to limit their carbon emissions in order to limit global warming. A major part of this in London and Brent must be changes to transport patterns and moving away from the use of the car (and diesel-based public transport) by making it much easier for people to cycle and walk.

The stress that has been placed here on the possibility of disturbing wildlife by increasing public access by foot and cycle is exaggerated, and is not serving the wider environmental agenda. It should be remembered that this same wildlife is existing, for example, in the area west of Silk Bridge, within a few yards of the noise and pollution of a major trunk road, the A5. The issues of cost are of course a different matter, but there are many sources of funding for good environmental projects, and a joint proposal drawn up by the boroughs and British Waterways on this would surely stand a good chance of attracting external funding.

We see a path for both cycling and walking round the whole reservoir, without having to cross, or travel along, major roads as a hugely desirable end goal. Currently, if cyclists in north-west London want to cycle on a long traffic-free circuit in an open space, they have to travel all the way to Richmond Park, where such a facility has been implemented with enormous success. The Welsh Harp is an obvious location for such a facility nearer to home, and such a circular path would be a tremendous environmental asset to both Brent and Barnet, really opening up the Welsh Harp reservoir and greatly increasing its sustainable use.

2b. Working towards a circular route

A circular route would not have to be created at once, but could be implemented by gradual stages. The most obvious initial need is for a connection across the River Brent and Canal Feeder downstream from the dam, so walkers and cyclists do not have to make the long detour via Aboyne Road or Braemar Avenue, Neasden Lane North, and Birchen Grove, in order to connect from the Neasden Recreation Ground to the open spaces to the north and west of the reservoir. Bridging the Silk Stream is less important as that can be done on the A5.

Detailed options for a cycle and walking route crossing the Brent and the Canal Feeder between the Dam and Neasden Lane North have been put forward before by Brent Cyclists to both LB Brent and British Waterways, in 2007. We would be glad to provide the Joint Consultative committee with these detailed option proposals. In March 2007 we met with British Waterways staff at their offices in Paddington to discuss them. The reaction at that time was fairly negative, and no progress has been made since. We would like to see the Joint Consultative Committee press for progress towards creating this connection, which, we believe, with the construction of a new pedestrian and cycle bridge, could be done without compromising the operational requirements of the reservoir (which was the objection of British waterways in 2007).

2c. Need for other links

Apart from this link, other desirable paths which do not exist the moment, and which should be for walkers and cyclists, are:

- 1) A proper path from the Kenwyn Avenue footbridge over the North Circular Road, across the "Sports Ground", connecting to the path into Braemar Avenue (which should be combined with tidying up the area by the footbridge)

- 2) A continuation of the new path in the Barnet part from Cool Oak Lane past the old cycle track, northwards, so that it connects up, past the bowling green, with the path from Goldsmith Avenue (which currently leads nowhere)
- 3) A path connecting the more westerly path running north from Cool Oak Lane northwards to Kingsbury Road, essentially running along the borough boundary.

These could be implemented quite easily, and (2) would be an intermediate stage of the eventual project to create a path round the whole reservoir.

3. Improvements to existing paths

On page 39 the recommendations include:

To improve the surface and width of several important paths around the Welsh Harp to provide through routes, links to site access points, or access to viewing points for visitors. These are:

- i) Birchen Grove to Cool Oak Lane (Capital RING route)
- ii) Neasden Recreation Ground to south shore panorama
- iii) Birchen Grove and proposed Cool Oak Lane car parks to Capital RING
- iv) Cool Oak Lane to eastern marsh bird hides

Paths i) and iii) are to be shared use between walkers and cyclists

We welcome these improvements, in part as they appear to formalise the existing sharing between walkers and cyclists, but we point out they do not provide anything new, so do not really address the access problems correctly outlined in Section 2.1.2.

3a. Cool Oak Lane and Wood Lane

We concur with the section 2.12 (iii) on p. 40 which states there are problems of conflicts between vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists at the Cool Oak Lane bridge crossing. The problems are not only at the bridge itself, however, but also the crossing of Cool Oak Lane west of the bridge to connect between the paths north and south of it, and also the crossing of Wood Lane at the Glenwood Avenue junction, where the cycle path branches off southwards by Woodfield School. Study should be given as to how to create safe pedestrian and cycle crossings at both these points, and serious traffic reduction and calming measures should be considered for Cool Oak Lane and Wood Lane, which, as the Draft Plan correctly states, are supposed to be part of the London Cycle Network. Currently Cool Oak Lane is a narrow rat-run with dangerous blind corners that severs the Welsh Harp open spaces and makes access to them difficult.

4. The Joint Consultative committee

We would consider it appropriate if there could be made available a place for a cycling representative on the JCC. We would like to help the JCC to formulate a strategy for access by foot and cycle.

Yours Faithfully,

David Arditti, for Brent Cyclists