27/07/2019

West Hendon Playing Fields Draft Masterplan.

The title of this draft masterplan is misleading as the proposals and their impacts extend far beyond the West Hendon playing fields. Some proposals are wholly or in part within the boundary of the Welsh Harp/Brent Reservoir Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Site of Metropolitan importance for Nature Conservation (SMINC) and some fall within the boundaries of the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The entire plan area is Metropolitan Open Land (MOL) and within the Impact Risk Zone (IRZ) of the SSSI and therefore proposals should only be approved if it can be shown they will not harm these protected areas, are not inappropriate developments within MOL and will protect the openness of the MOL. We would like to see the LNR and SSSI boundary and IRZ shown on the masterplan in order that the full impact of the proposals can clearly be seen.

The West Hendon playing fields are part of London’s strategic green and blue corridors connecting the Welsh Harp to other green spaces, gardens and designated wildlife sites in the wider landscape. Corridors enable wildlife to move around the urban landscape. The proposals will replace significant areas of green infrastructure with hard landscaping, artificial surfaces, considerable parts of which will be fenced and illuminated which will restrict wildlife movement and result in a considerable loss of habitat and foraging opportunities. As such, many of the proposals would be contrary to the London Plan, Barnet’s Development Management policies, Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981and the aims of the All London Green Grid (ALGG).

We are particularly concerned about the following aspects,

* Installation of artificial pitches and car parking on existing grass pitches will result in the loss of approximately 2.8 ha (7 acre) of natural grassland.
* The proposed fencing around artificial pitches will obstruct the movement and foraging of mammals such as foxes, hedgehogs and badgers harming the openness of the MOL. The council should be aware that there have been regular sighting of badgers in gardens close to the proposal area. Therefore we would recommend that surveys should be conducted in order to understand the impact the proposals may have on wildlife.
* Artificial lighting has been shown to have a significant effect on the behaviour of nocturnal wildlife in particular bats and their prey. The proposed floodlit pitches will illuminate adjacent woodland, hedgerow and trees. Illumination of some foot and cycle paths which pass through the SSSI close to the water’s edge could effectively result in a significant reduction in foraging area.
* The proposed location of one of the U13/14 football pitches (3) is partly within the LNR and would require the removal of two mature trees and the loss of scrub used annually by whitethroats to breed.
* It is proposed to create a high ropes area (9) in woodland within the LNR. This will require the permanent destruction of, and ongoing disturbance to, an area of quiet woodland habitat. This must be relocated or removed from the plan.
* Many additional new foot and cycle routes will result in the loss of significant areas of habitat and increase disturbance within the LNR and the SSSI. Some proposed routes also traverse steep inclines and marshland unsuited to paths. Widening of some existing paths could accommodate anticipated increases in footfall with far less habitat loss and could improve sightlines and therefore increased natural surveillance.
* The position of the proposed new bird hides is within a quite area of wet woodland, not adjacent to water as shown on the plan. The area of open water has reduced considerably due to increased silt deposits. The installation and ongoing access to hides in this area are likely to cause unacceptable levels of disturbance to secretive over wintering waterfowl that use this area. We would prefer to see a new hide approximately 70 m NW of the existing public hide and improvements made to the existing hide to increase the field of view and replace its roof.

In addition,

* The proposed location of the coach drop-off (3) is ill considered as tight bends, narrow bridge and weight restrictions in force along Cool Oak Lane make it unsuitable for such vehicles.
* New and existing planting screening car park areas will reduce natural surveillance and is likely to increase the incidence of existing problems of fly-tipping and other anti-social and criminal behaviours in these areas.
* New and additional native hedgerow planting would be welcome especially on parts of the Northern and Western boundary of the park as this will provide increased privacy and security for neighbouring properties as well as creating additional foraging, commuting and roosting habitat for a wide range of wildlife.
* We would like to see a range of Green Infrastructure incorporated into the design of the new community sports hub (4) such as living roof and walls, rain water harvesting etc., providing new habitats, making the hub more water and energy efficient and visually integrating it into its natural surroundings.