

A Joint Vision for the Welsh Harp  
July 2023



# Introducing this document

This is an exciting time for the Welsh Harp. A significant place for a multitude of reasons, it is a nationally significant Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and currently the focus of a large amount of public and community attention; a space that is valued, loved and cared-for by many people and communities in London and beyond.

Taking advantage of this moment, this Joint Vision was commissioned to deliver a collectively-authored, ambitious and realisable vision for the Welsh Harp / Brent Reservoir and surrounding landscapes, serving as the starting point of a larger public conversation about the future of the Welsh Harp.

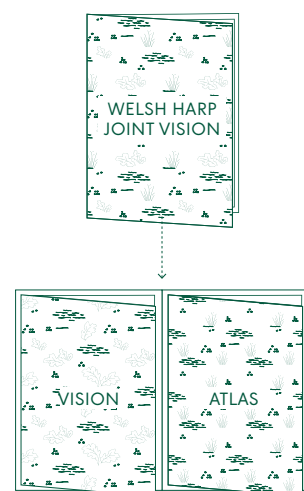
The Vision is presented in two parts, Vision and Atlas.

Vision, which begins with a clear overall Vision statement, then sets out a collection of detailed Principles (grouped under four overarching Themes) that should be used by all parties with responsibility for the future of the Welsh Harp. (including the key landowners and managers, the London Boroughs of Barnet, Brent and Canal & River Trust. See page 89 for more details on ownership and management). It concludes with a series of Scenarios which pick a number of key threads and set out how they might be realised, based upon conversations had during the project.

All this work is supported by a clear body of data and evidence, including a significant body of public conversations and engagement activity - all of which is included in the Atlas section, which sets out the evidence, mapping and public knowledge that underpins and informs the vision.

The Joint Vision has been produced by DK-CM and JCLA - architects, researchers, engagement specialists and landscape architects - working in collaboration with diverse stakeholders. It was commissioned by the Welsh Harp Strategy Group, which includes representatives of the London Borough of Barnet, the London Borough of Brent, the Canal & River Trust, the Environment Agency, Natural England, London Wildlife Trust, Thames 21 and the Greater London Authority. This group, and the work it is delivering, represents a major shift in how the Welsh Harp is maintained and cared for. This Group will continue to have a strategic role in taking forward the Vision. The Vision was also produced through engagement with the many organisations and community groups who use and care for the Welsh Harp in diverse ways, many of whom have worked tirelessly and over decades to maintain and enhance it.

We hope that this Joint Vision marks a significant moment in the history of the Welsh Harp, when effort and commitment aligns to build, collectively, a positive future for this valuable place.



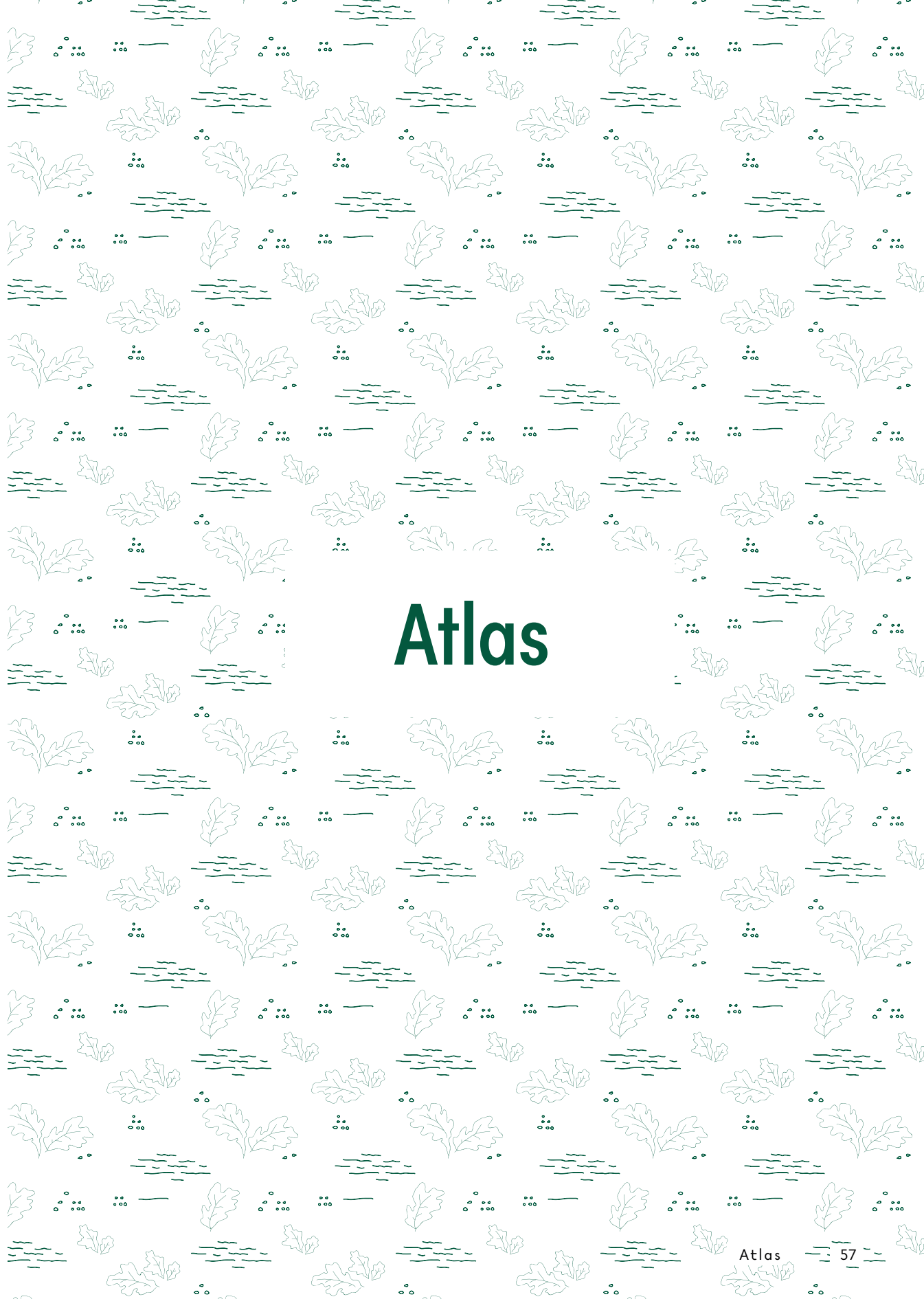
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# Atlas

# A Human History

The Welsh Harp is situated at the confluence of the River Brent and the Silk Stream. During the development of Britain's canal network in the early 19th century, this strategic meeting point was turned into the water supply for the Paddington branch of what is now the Grand Union Canal. A narrow feeder was constructed to channel water, replenishing those lost through leakage and busy locks. This was soon followed by the creation of the reservoir in 1834-35, to ensure a reliable supply as the canal network expanded.

The reservoir is man-made, created to serve the canal system. Its form over time has responded to the requirements of the canal it feeds, three miles downstream. Despite this, the Welsh Harp has significantly impacted the spatial and social development of its immediate and wider surroundings and is deeply embedded in its neighbouring communities. Understanding the historic narratives of the Welsh Harp allows us to better understand its possible futures.



The Kingsbury dam and its overflow, c. 1900 (Brent archives image 1341.)



Cool Oak Lane, with its causeway and bridge across the reservoir's northern arm, c. 1900. (Barnet Local Studies Centre image 3284.)



Sunday afternoon walk in the Welsh Harp, 1897. Geoffrey Hewlett Collection, accessed via Wembley Matters blog, 19.08.21.

## A reservoir in agricultural landscape

When built, the reservoir flooded agricultural land near the villages of Kingsbury and West Hendon, seven miles from Charing Cross along the historic Edgware Road. The reservoir was a popular spot for local bathers, anglers and naturalists, who were drawn by the wetland birdlife. The dam was not sufficiently monitored and maintained, resulting in a dramatic collapse in 1841 when it was overwhelmed by heavy rainfall. Following this an attendant's cottage was constructed on the Eastern edge of the reservoir, to oversee the water levels.

The Regent's Canal experienced significant water loss from its locks in the 1850s as London developed and traffic increased. To ensure the water supply could be maintained, the reservoir was dramatically enlarged in 1854 from 69 to 400 acres. The Edgware Road was protected by a large embankment, whilst much of the Northern and Southern banks were overrun.

## A leisure destination for inner-city Londoners

As London became increasingly developed, the reservoir became an appealing escape from inner-city London. The narrative of the reservoir at this time was shaped by the Welsh Harp Inn, located by the inlet of the Brent River on Edgware Road. It was bought by a local farmer Williams Warner in 1858, who obtained rights to use the reservoir for recreational purposes, turning it into one of London's most popular leisure destinations. He named the pub the Welsh Harp, the name by which the reservoir had by then become known. The reservoir was synonymous with the Inn and the narratives of the two were largely indistinguishable. Visitors enjoyed fishing, boating, swimming and ice skating on the water, whilst playing bowls, cricket and racing on the banks. The Inn was later expanded to include a restaurant and music hall.

The popularity of the Welsh Harp led to the opening of Welsh Harp Station in 1870, catering to excursion traffic. The line brought thousands of visitors from inner London to enjoy the open water. 200 houses were built in West Hendon from the Edgware Road down to the water's edge, occupied by commuters, but much of the landscape remained rural. Locals profited from city visitors, with many serving tea to visitors on weekends.

The character of the Welsh Harp began to change towards the end of the century, as the land on the Southern bank became industrialised and the Inn changed management. The popularity of the reservoir declined, leading to the eventual closure of the Welsh Harp Station in 1903.



The Old Welsh Harp Inn, c. 1880, Brent Magazine, Feb. 2005.



Staples Corner in 1930 (Historic England, epw032171).

## A resource for local communities

During the war the surrounding neighbourhoods became centres for the new aircraft industry. Between 1917 and 1921 the Mechanical Warfare Department used the fields between the reservoir and the top of Dollis Hill as testing grounds for their new tanks. Open ground surrounding the reservoir became space for growing. The reservoir's distinctive shape made it highly recognisable to enemy bombers during the Second World War and the area was heavily targeted.

The industrialisation of the area during the First World War and the building of the North Circular Road in the 1920s saw a decline in the reservoir's attraction. Parts of the reservoir were

in-filled and the River Brent culverted along its eastern arm to make way for the road. The junction of the North Circular and Edgware Roads were well-known for traffic jams. The construction of the North Circular led to housing development on increasingly accessible land around the reservoir, particularly the northern slopes of Dollis Hill, Church Lane and areas of Kingsbury. Willesden Urban District Council acquired 40 acres of land on the Kingsbury side of the reservoir, intending to build a cemetery. Willesden Council opened a recreation ground on the Southern edge of the Harp to cater to Neasden's growing population. They built a library with an open air reading terrace overlooking the water.

## A vital green space for people and wildlife

The reservoir remained popular for naturalists, who swam on the North bank, often causing local objection. The Brent Sailing Club was formed at The Old Welsh Harp Inn in 1930. Followed by the London Motor Boat Club.

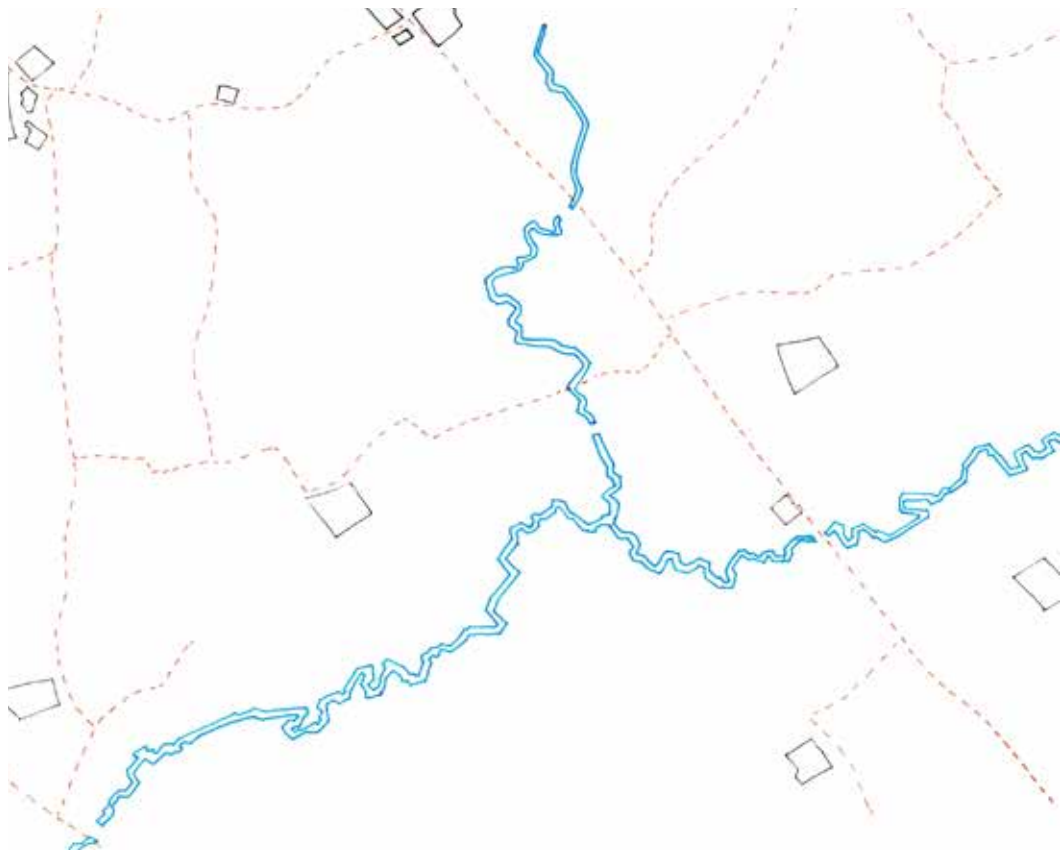
The reservoir came into public ownership in 1948, as part of the post-war Labour government's nationalisation of transport industries. In 1950, the Welsh Harp was designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, due to the rare bird species and plant life. This restricted the recreational use of the reservoir. Sailing remained popular with several large companies setting up their own clubs for employees.

Local organisations, such as the Wembley Sailing Club and Sea Cadets were formed by the north end of the dam. Swimming and fishing are now banned through local byelaws. The Welsh Harp Conservation Group was formed in 1972, following a battle to protect the habitats of nesting birds from the development of a marina near the eastern arm.

The Brent Cross flyover was built in the 1960s to address major traffic problems at Staples Corner. The Welsh Harp Inn remained until 1971, when it was demolished to make way for the southerly extension of the M1 motorway.

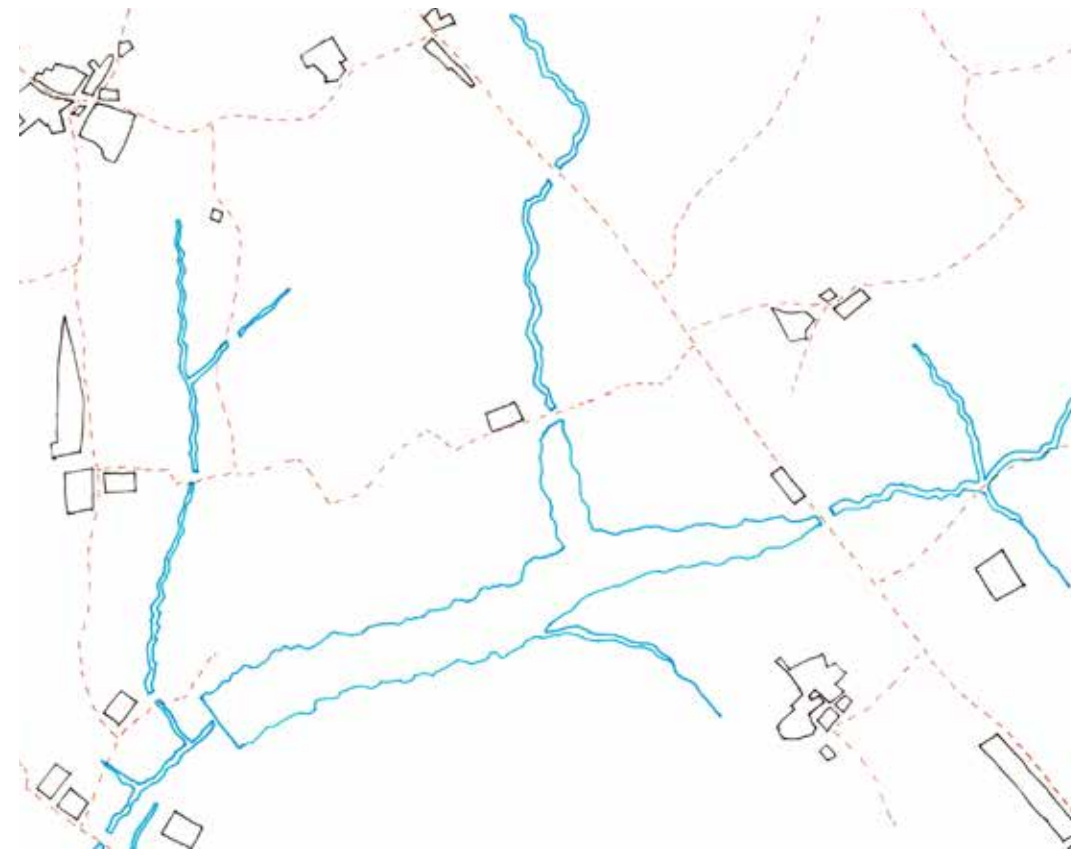


The reading terrace at Neasden Library, 1931. (Brent Archives online image 2926)



### c. 1800

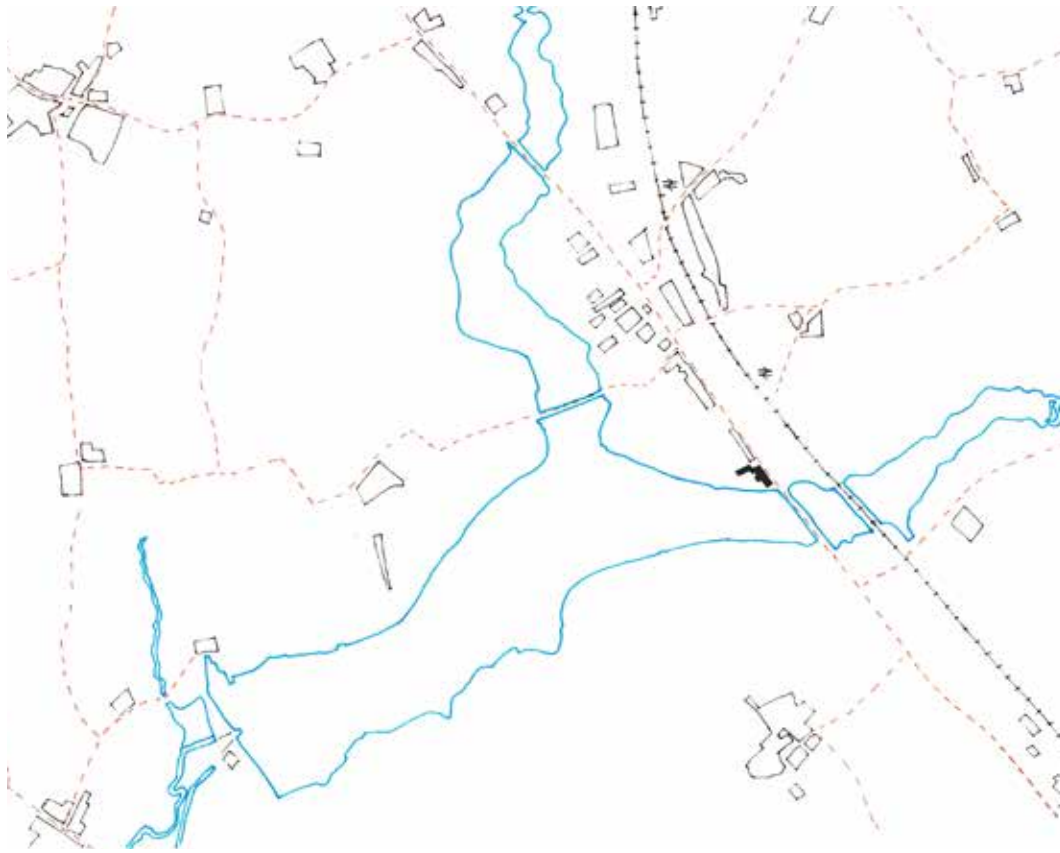
- The Silk Stream to the North, and River Brent to the East meet to form the River Brent
- The rivers flow across agricultural land near the villages of Kingsbury, to the North-West and West Hendon.
- The Edgware Road, a Roman legacy, leads directly to London.



### c. 1835

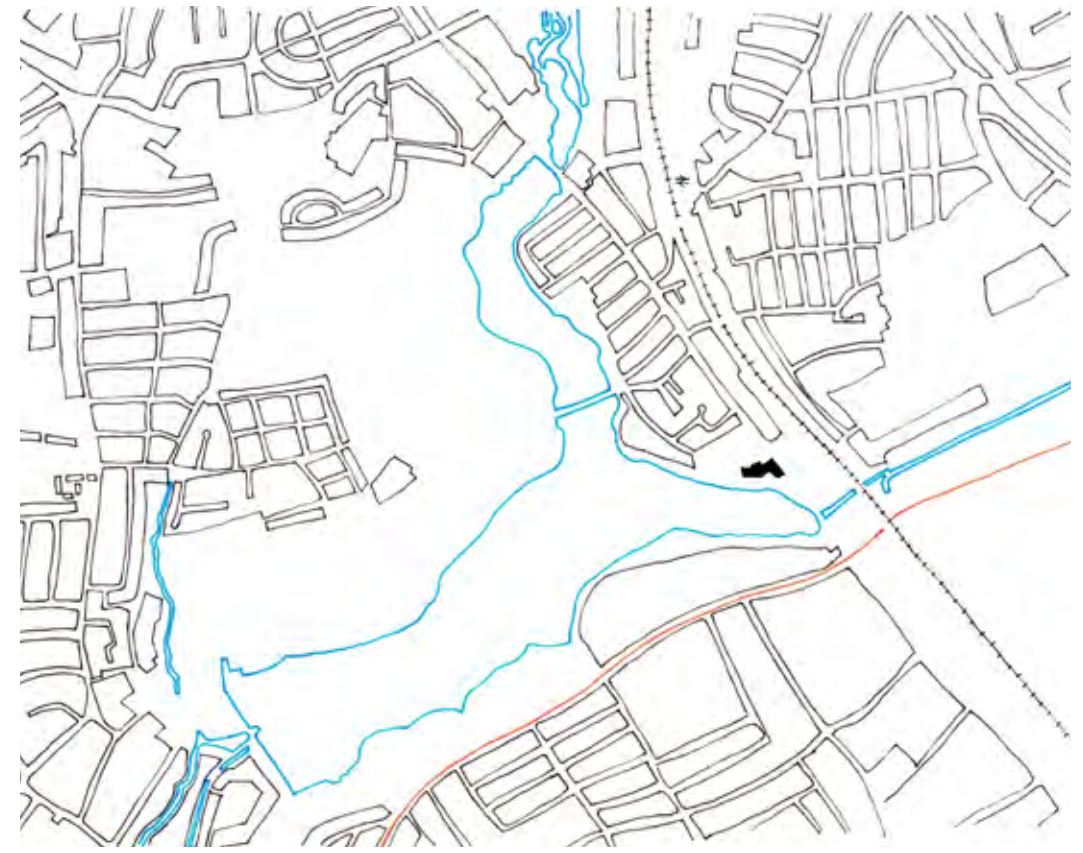
- A dam is constructed at the confluence of the two rivers, flooding the surrounding farmland to create Kingsbury Reservoir.
- A narrow feeder runs South to channel water to newly constructed Grand Union Canal.





### c. 1890

- The reservoir was dramatically enlarged from 69 to 400 acres in 1854, in response to the significant water loss from increased traffic on the Regent's Canal.
- The arrival of the railway and Hendon Station in 1868 led to linear development along Edgware Road.
- A large embankment protects new development along the Edgware Road.
- The Welsh Harp Inn, highlighted in black, obtains rights to use the reservoir for recreational purposes. Its popularity leads to the opening of Welsh Harp Station in 1870, catering to excursion traffic.

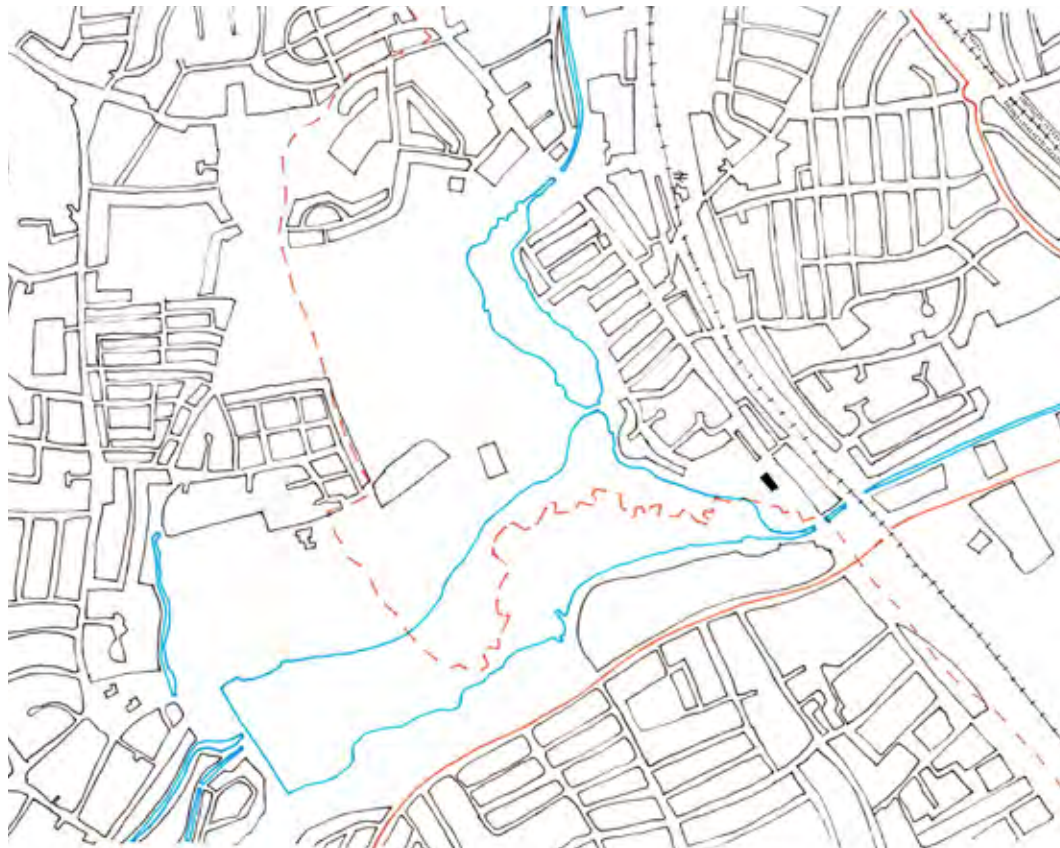


### c. 1930

- The building of the North Circular Road, in red, in the 1920s led to parts of the reservoir being in-filled and the River Brent culverted along its Eastern arm.
- The construction of the N. Circular led to housing development on the land surrounding the reservoir, particularly Dollis Hill, Church Lane and Kingsbury.
- Neasden Recreation Ground was created on the Southern edge of the reservoir to cater to Neasden's growing population. This included a library with an open air reading terrace.
- The Brent Sailing Club was formed at the Old Welsh Harp Inn in 1930.







-- -- Borough Boundary

### c. 1965

- The reservoir came into public ownership in 1948, as part of the post-war Labour government's nationalisation of transport industries.
- In 1950, the Welsh Harp was first designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, due to the rare bird species and plant life. This restricted the recreational use of the reservoir. Swimming and fishing were banned through local byelaws.
- The borough boundary between Brent and Barnet were constituted in 1965.
- Sailing remained popular with several large companies setting up their own clubs for employees.



-- -- Borough Boundary

### c. 1990

- The M1 motorway was built in 1965.
- The Brent Cross flyover followed to address the major traffic problems at Staple's corner.
- The Welsh Harp inn was demolished in 1971, to make way for the southerly extension of the M1 motorway.
- The Welsh Harp Conservation Group was formed in 1972, following a battle to protect the habitats of nesting birds from the proposed development of a marina on the eastern arm.
- In the mid 1980s substantial effort and investment is made by community groups to create and diversify habitats.
- The site was re-designated as a SSSI in 1985 and a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation in 1987.



# Natural Signatures

The regional scale sets the scene for understanding underlying landscape character. Across the wider area in which the Welsh Harp is situated runs the wide band of the London Clay formation. Bedrocks laid down over millennia result in specific soil types that influence what plants may grow and thrive. The broad shape of the land, its topography, waters and structure, further steers the possible landscape development, both natural and man-made. London Clay as bedrock is broadly characterised as slightly calcareous and with poor infiltration, meaning it is able to support particular habitat types such as acid grassland and the wider network of rivers, streams and wet woodland that run across this belt of clay. Further influencing the area is the transition between seasonally wet deep clay soils, stretching out towards Harrow on the Hill, and seasonally wet loam that has made this part of north-west London such productive agricultural land.

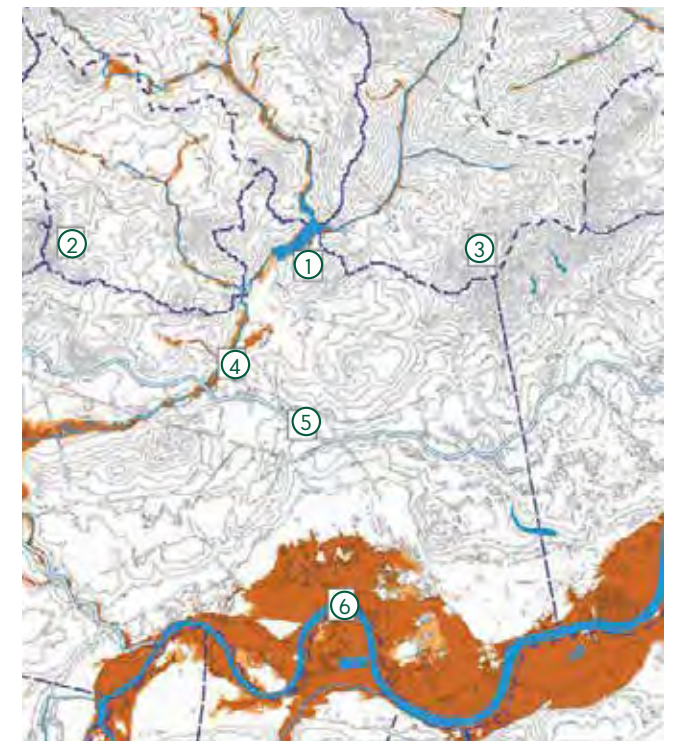
The Brent River valley, of which the Welsh Harp is a part, is further characterised by the presence of alluvial silt deposits that form a key component of riverine corridors. This superficial geology, supported by seasonally wet, deep loam soils, is concentrated around the main river corridor, supporting particular types of flora & fauna, riparian habitats and transitional edges. Furthermore, the topographic variation across this area is characterised by a varied network of natural watercourses caught between significant high points in an otherwise fairly low-lying landscape. Harrow on the Hill to the west and Hampstead Heath to the east provide significant areas of elevation, between which the natural network of rivers and valleys lie.

Because of these underlying geographical factors, the Welsh Harp sits at the intersection of 3 different natural landscape area types; the riverine valley of the Brent, the Barnet clay plateau, and the clay ridges of Finchley & Hampstead. The intersection of these landscape types has resulted in a rich and varied natural signature that draws influences and conditions from many sources.

- ① Welsh Harp
- ② Harrow on the Hill
- ③ Hampstead Heath
- ④ Brent River Valley
- ⑤ Grand Union Canal (formerly Grand Junction)
- ⑥ The Thames

The River Brent flows within a well-connected green corridor of remnant semi-natural woodland habitats and marginal vegetation which also surrounds the Brent Reservoir. Together these areas form a 'core' ecological network along the Brent Valley. Their biodiversity value is enhanced by the surrounding soft landscape uses which buffer the core areas and provide accessible riverside walks.

Source: 'Landscape Character Types of London - London's Natural Signatures: The London Landscape Framework / January 2011, Alan Baxter.



## The Middlesex countryside

The historic county of Middlesex formerly covered the region in which the Welsh Harp is situated until 1965, when it was absorbed into Greater London. This mainly low-lying area is held between three rivers, the Thames to the south and the River Lea and River Colne to the east and west, and historically criss-crossed by numerous tributaries and small streams, many now covered over. This land was once heavily wooded, home of the great Forest of Middlesex thought to have been dominated by oak, with wet woodland of alder and willow along rivers and streams.

With changing intensification of use, the area was gradually deforested and land given over to agriculture. Until the 19th century Middlesex remained predominantly rural; a mosaic of fields, meadows, heaths and woods with a good portion of land used as commons.

Often dominated by gorse, heather and bracken these spaces along with fields, hedgerow boundaries and patches of woodland provided valuable habitat for a range of species, including birds and other wildlife.

This mosaic of woodland, grassland and heath, with hedgerow field boundaries and wide vistas from high points helped to shape the development seen in the later half of the 20th century. Fragments of this mosaic landscape can still be seen in the pattern of urban development, with glimpses of hedgerow boundaries, streets aligned with old field patterns, and preserved open spaces around the Welsh Harp visible to this day. However, few people likely now have a sense of old Middlesex inhabiting these spaces, and this rich historical association has the potential to be better explored, explained and understood within the local area.



Source: Map of Middlesex by Thomas Kitchen, 1769. Public domain.

## Access to the countryside

With the arrival of the railway the agricultural character of Middlesex quickly changed to become an area very much on the 'edge of London', with its own distinct identity as 'working countryside' at risk of being overtaken. Development of the 'Metroland' ideal, with access to the countryside made easy through improved transport links and availability of suburban housing, caused the function of this part of the countryside to shift from working to recreation. The dissolution of the county of Middlesex in 1965 to become part of Greater London, further diluted the area's sense of identity and purpose.

The development of the Welsh Harp as a recreational area was inherently linked to greater access to the natural draw of the countryside for the inner city population of London during the 20th century. Recreation, fresh air and fun were big draws to the local area, helped in part by the proximity of destinations such as Wembley Park.

The sense of wider, egalitarian access to the open spaces surrounding the Welsh Harp remains in the network of Public Rights Of Way across the wider site, including designated long-distance footpaths such as the Capital Ring. While these assets are very much valued and supported, they suffer from a lack of holistic planning and accessibility, with the result that a complete loop around the reservoir is currently not possible.



Transport posters extolling the natural virtues of The countryside in 'Metro-land'.

*A hidden gem of open space, a large lake formed on the River Brent to supply the Grand Union Canal. Though a SSSI and birding centre, it has great potential for increased recreational use. Cycling and walking links across the A1 and North Circular, and into adjacent residential areas are needed in order to meet this potential.*

All London Green Grid AF11 - 11.8 Brent Reservoir

## The working countryside

The change from working countryside and agricultural land to urban & recreational development resulted in the loss of many natural open spaces, hedgerow boundaries and areas of woodland, directly affecting the ecological network of the local area. Many complete vegetated links were now severed between remaining open green spaces, and much migratory, foraging and habitat land was lost.

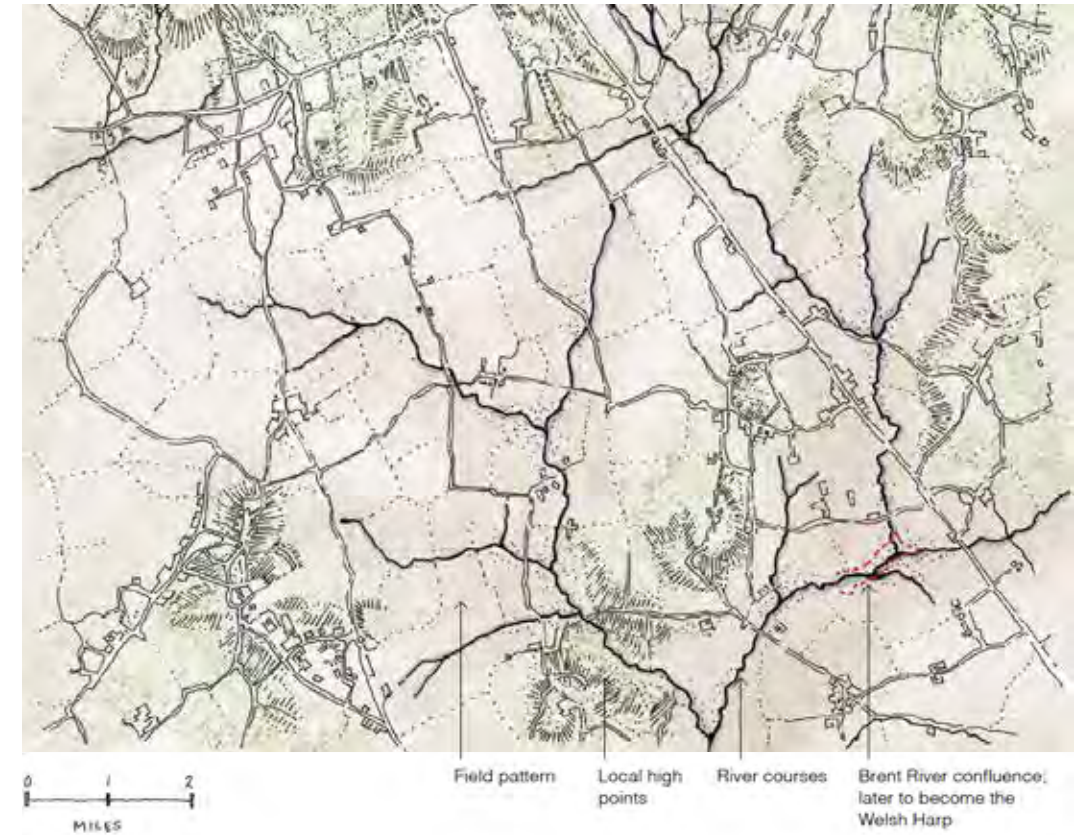
This change was reflected in the construction of the Brent reservoir itself – the modification of this natural watercourse into a constructed reservoir for the purposes of supplying the Grand Junction canal as a man-made waterway. The ability for nature to thrive in constructed environments within the London locality exemplifies itself in the Welsh Harp, long noted as a home to rare waterfowl<sup>1</sup>, first publicised by the observations of Bond & Harting in the mid-19th century. This tension between the natural and constructed remains in the space to this day.

Partly as a result of conservation designations placed on the space, such as the SSSI designation in the southern portion of the reservoir, there is a need to address both conservation and evolution in the development of a joint vision. However, there is strong precedent in the local area, such as at Fryent Country Park, of management techniques employed to promote productive uses in open spaces that maximise value for wildlife and ecology. Specific, low-impact management techniques can support a wide range of diverse habitat types, enhancing biodiversity value across individual sites, helping repair ecological links across the wider area and offering potential for working groups to engage with the management of spaces in a more direct way.



Cool Oak Lane, Source: Barnet Local Studies Centre

<sup>1</sup>Aquatic birds such as great crested grebe, swans, various ducks, geese and other birds associated with open water habitats



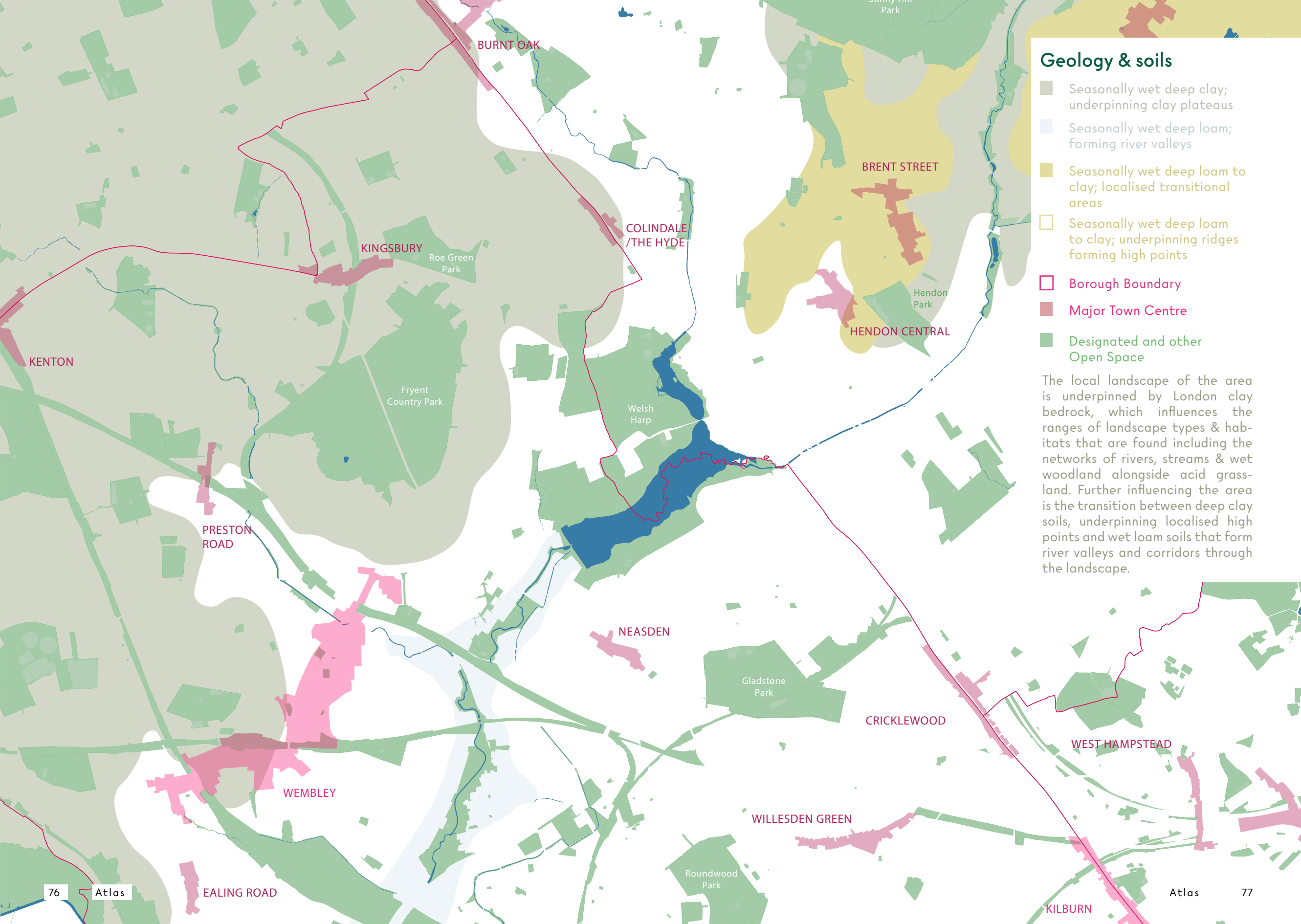
Historic landscape pattern, based on map published 1822.

*'The Welsh Harp...became one of the most famous localities in the country for rare waterfowl thanks to the observations of F. Bond and J.E Harting. The birds which they and other observers recorded from this one spot up to 1866 included such remarkable rarities as squacco heron... and grey phalarope... at that time recorded from almost no other locality in Middlesex'*

R.S. Fitter, London's Natural History, 1945

## Historic Landforms & Influences

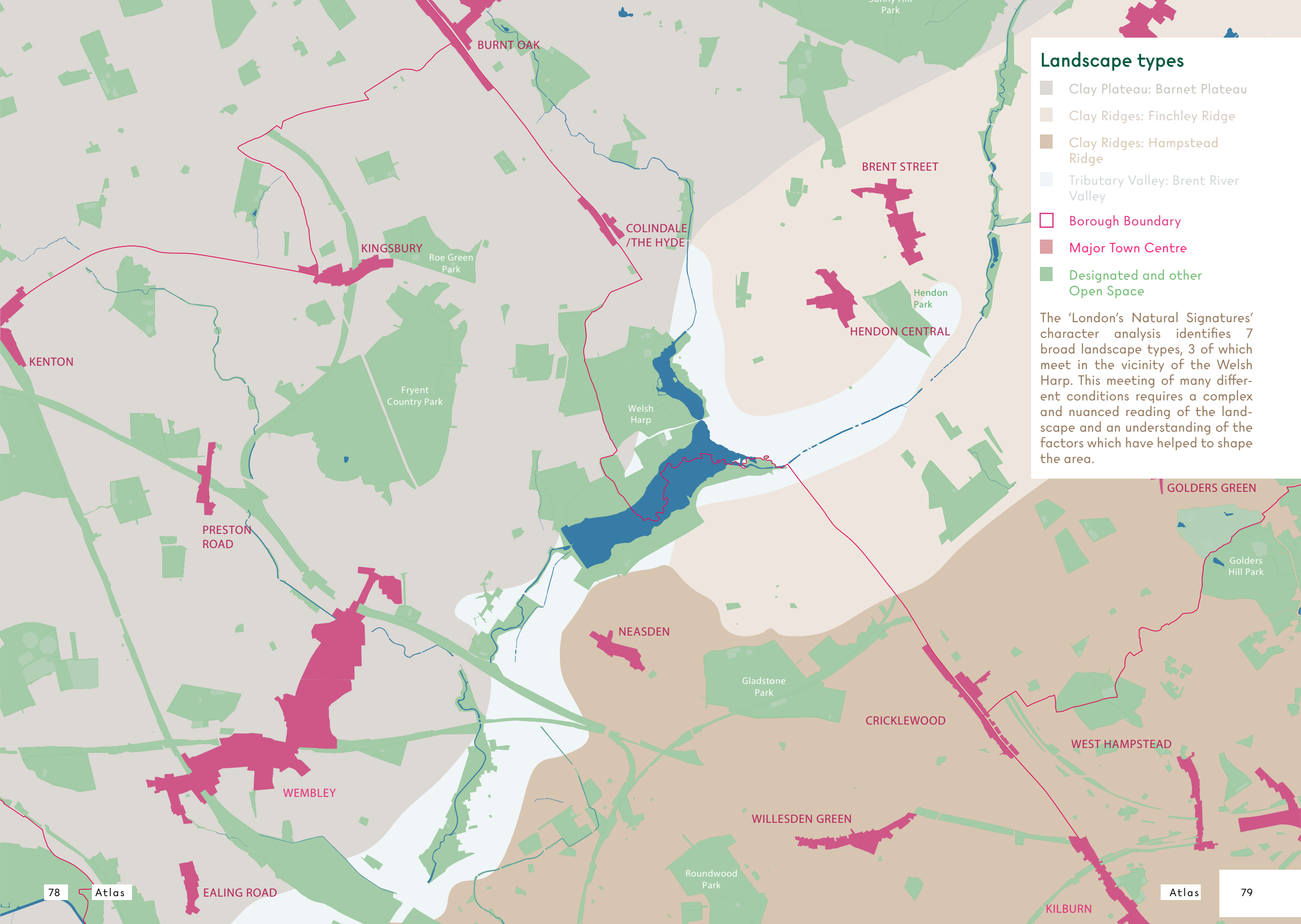
Before development, the landscape of the area was heavily influenced by its topography; river courses and valleys as low points, with local high points such as Harrow on the Hill. This historic field pattern can still be glimpsed today in the development of local street patterns, remnants of remaining open space and the development of major transport corridors.



## Geology & soils

- Seasonally wet deep clay; underpinning clay plateaus
- Seasonally wet deep loam; forming river valleys
- Seasonally wet deep loam to clay; localised transitional areas
- Seasonally wet deep loam to clay; underpinning ridges forming high points
- Borough Boundary
- Major Town Centre
- Designated and other Open Space

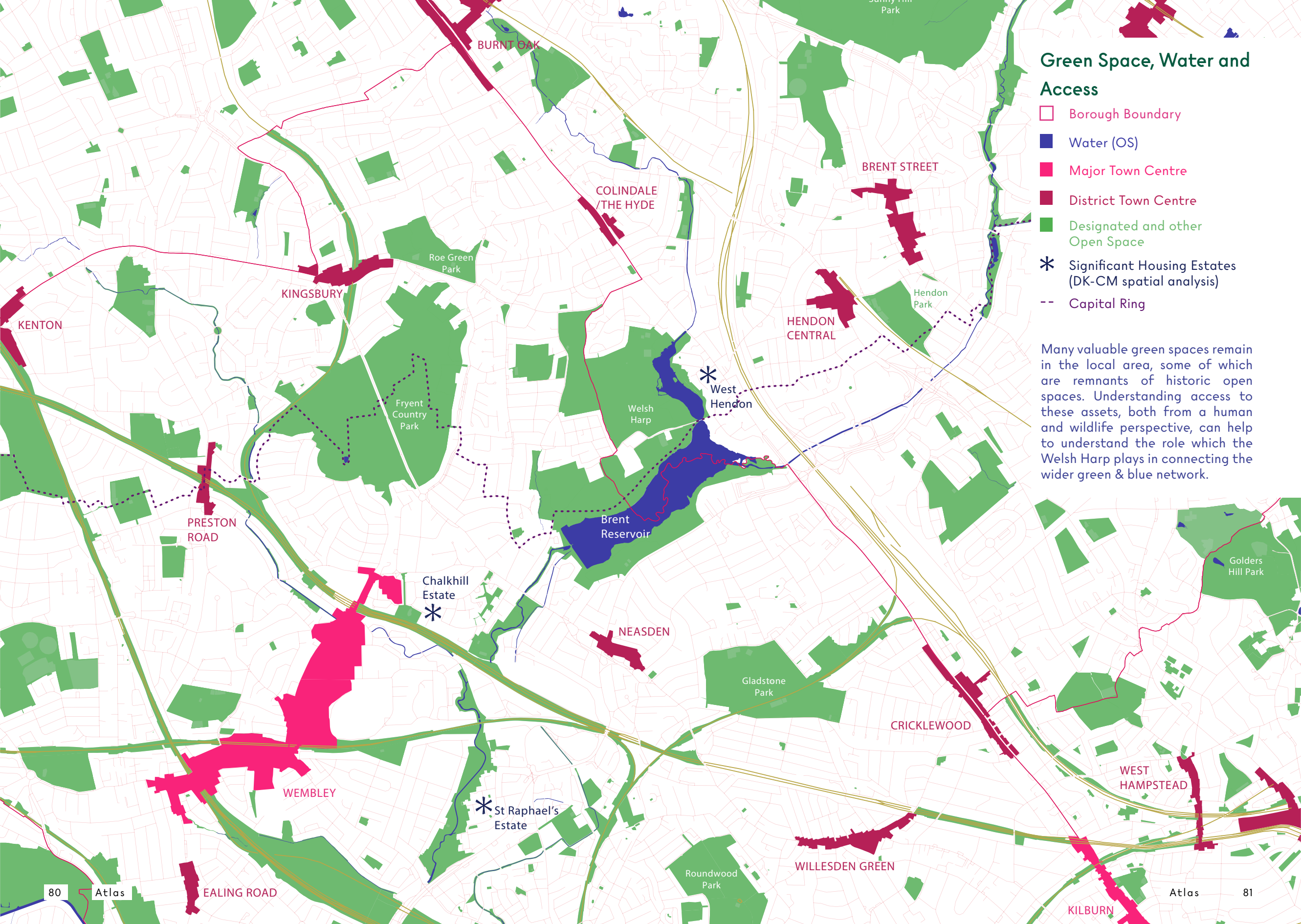
The local landscape of the area is underpinned by London clay bedrock, which influences the ranges of landscape types & habitats that are found including the networks of rivers, streams & wet woodland alongside acid grassland. Further influencing the area is the transition between deep clay soils, underpinning localised high points and wet loam soils that form river valleys and corridors through the landscape.



### Landscape types

- Clay Plateau: Barnet Plateau
- Clay Ridges: Finchley Ridge
- Clay Ridges: Hampstead Ridge
- Tributary Valley: Brent River Valley
- Borough Boundary
- Major Town Centre
- Designated and other Open Space

The 'London's Natural Signatures' character analysis identifies 7 broad landscape types, 3 of which meet in the vicinity of the Welsh Harp. This meeting of many different conditions requires a complex and nuanced reading of the landscape and an understanding of the factors which have helped to shape the area.



### Green Space, Water and Access

- Borough Boundary
- Water (OS)
- Major Town Centre
- District Town Centre
- Designated and other Open Space
- ✱ Significant Housing Estates (DK-CM spatial analysis)
- Capital Ring

Many valuable green spaces remain in the local area, some of which are remnants of historic open spaces. Understanding access to these assets, both from a human and wildlife perspective, can help to understand the role which the Welsh Harp plays in connecting the wider green & blue network.

# Ecology

The Welsh Harp is an unusual and ecologically significant body of water in London because of its natural margins, which provide a vital wetland habitat for birds and fauna. Accordingly, the reservoir and marginal habitats were designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1950 and re-designated in 1985. The site provides habitat for breeding wetland birds, with notable numbers of nesting great crested grebe and a diversity of wintering waterfowl. It is also celebrated for the special plant species that grow along its water margins, which are of special note for Greater London. This precious landscape sits within other diverse habitats, including scrub, marsh, rough grassland, woodland, hedgerows, allotments, playing fields and suburban gardens.

## Habitats of principle importance

**ACID, CALCEROUS, NEUTRAL GRASSLANDS AND SCRUB:** Substantial areas of the Welsh Harp open space are covered in rough grassland and scrub.

**IMPROVED GRASSLAND:** Playing fields provide feeding opportunities for many bird species.

**REEDBEDS:** Reedbeds are particularly important refuges and breeding areas for many species of bird, primarily breeding waterfowl and other wetland birds. This habitat occupies the eastern and northern marshes, but also extends westwards along the northern and southern shores of the reservoir. The northern and eastern marshes, overlooked by hides, form the neglected wetlands of the SSSI bird refuge, created in 1985. The habitat contains reedbeds and exposed silt but through neglect, has morphed into wet woodland, with local breeding numbers of wetland birds dropping significantly since 2000.

The marshes have accumulated debris for many years, the scale of which became visible following the lowering of the water level in 2021 for a safety inspection of the dam. This incited local conservationists to set up a continuing campaign for those managing the Welsh Harp to remove pollution.

**WATER:** The water covers an area of about 170 acres. It contains a depth suitable for diving waterbirds, as well as shallow margins for ducks and waders.

**DECIDUOUS WOODLAND:** There are several woodland areas of varying character across the Welsh Harp, including willow and oak.

Marginal woodland throughout the Welsh Harp plays a vital role in screening the site and its fragile habitats from surrounding development, busy roads or human activity.

Marginal woodland at the edge of marshland and fen sits within the SSSI. Natural England has advised sensitively cutting back certain areas of woodland and scrub to prevent encroachment into fen and reedbed.

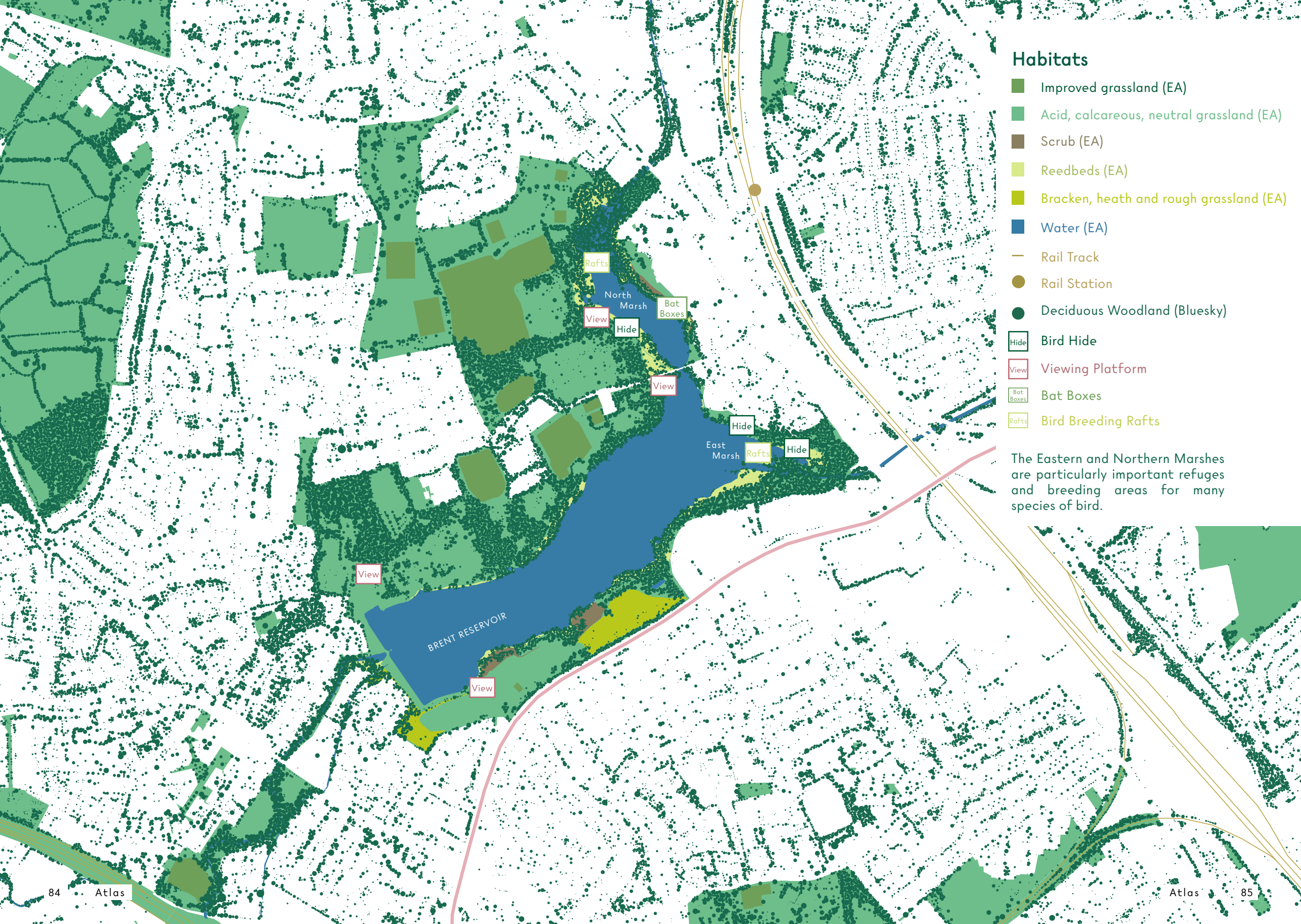
**GARDENS:** Beyond the extents of the Welsh Harp, surrounding gardens play a vital role in providing secluded feeding areas.

## Other habitats

**ALLOTMENTS AND HEDGEROWS:** The site contains a significant length of ancient hedgerow, which is vital for the survival of breeding passerines. Overgrown allotments also provide suitable shrubbery.







## Habitats

- Improved grassland (EA)
- Acid, calcareous, neutral grassland (EA)
- Scrub (EA)
- Reedbeds (EA)
- Bracken, heath and rough grassland (EA)
- Water (EA)
- Rail Track
- Rail Station
- Deciduous Woodland (Bluesky)
- Bird Hide
- Viewing Platform
- Bat Boxes
- Bird Breeding Rafts

The Eastern and Northern Marshes are particularly important refuges and breeding areas for many species of bird.

# Policy & Management

The boundaries of the Welsh Harp, its management, protected sites and policies, are often misunderstood, blurred or contested. Establishing demarcations and uncertainties is vital in order to support the landscape and its communities more intelligently, ensuring that spaces and uses are adequately protected and celebrated.

## Ownership and Management

The Welsh Harp lies on the boundary of two boroughs, the LBBrent and LBBarnet, with the boundary line following the original meandering course of the River Brent. The Canal and River Trust owns the reservoir. Some of this land is occupied by leaseholders. Much of the maintenance is carried out by these three bodies. However, the complex ownership of the reservoir has historically led to the site's neglect, with maintenance, governance and responsibility being unclear or unfulfilled. The Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee was established to address these gaps, co-ordinating interests of leisure, maintenance and nature conservation at the Welsh Harp. Several maintenance tasks are undertaken by external voluntary bodies. There are also local groups that have taken responsibility for reporting on the state of the reservoir and campaigning for its improved management.

Brent or LBBarnet. This was designated in 1950, and re-notified under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 due to the reservoir's breeding wetland birds, wintering water fowl and the variety of plant species. The SSSI designation restricts a range of operations that could damage the site, and requires written consent from Natural England, before these can be undertaken.

A large part of the reservoir and its surrounding open space is designated as a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation. This is a designation used for planning purposes and highlights the need to enhance both recreational and nature conservation interest in the area. LBBrent and LBBarnet, declared much of the Welsh Harp as a statutory Local Nature Reserve in 2005.

## Open space designations

The Welsh Harp was first designated by local authorities as the Welsh Harp Open Space in 1965. This means the space receives strong protection against development and is recognised as vital infrastructure within an urban area, both locally and within London. Its original designation followed objections to Willesden Council's prolonged campaign between 1920 to 1964 to develop the land to the west of the reservoir into a cemetery. Parts of the Welsh Harp were designated as Metropolitan Open Land, affording it the same level of protection as the Metropolitan Green Belt.

## Local Plan Policy

The reservoir lies across two London boroughs, Brent and Barnet, with the boundary line following the original meandering course of the River Brent. The course of the river Brent is still visible along the bed of the reservoir when drained. The reservoir runs adjacent to diverse sites, including areas of Strategic Housing Land, Locally Significant and Strategic Industrial Areas and Conservation Areas.

## Nature conservation designations

A number of conservation designations have been introduced across the Welsh Harp to protect its important habitats. The highest level is a site biological Site of Special Scientific Interest, attached to the water and its margins. The Welsh Harp is the only SSSI in either the LB

## Development

The built environment around the Welsh Harp Reservoir is expected to change considerably over the next decade or so, as land is organised to enable regeneration. The Opportunity Area Sites, within the London Borough of Barnet have an important role to play in the future character of the Welsh Harp. Done well, development could contribute positively to the Vision helping to unlock and enable improvements and protecting the integrity of the SSSI.

The Canal and River Trust own and manage the dam, canal feeder, reservoir, and immediately adjacent land.

London Borough of Barnet and London Borough of Brent own the adjacent public spaces and are involved in managing the Welsh Harp; grounds maintenance of the open spaces. Each borough has a mobile Warden service. Brent has contracted the grounds maintenance operations to Veolia PLC since September 2014.

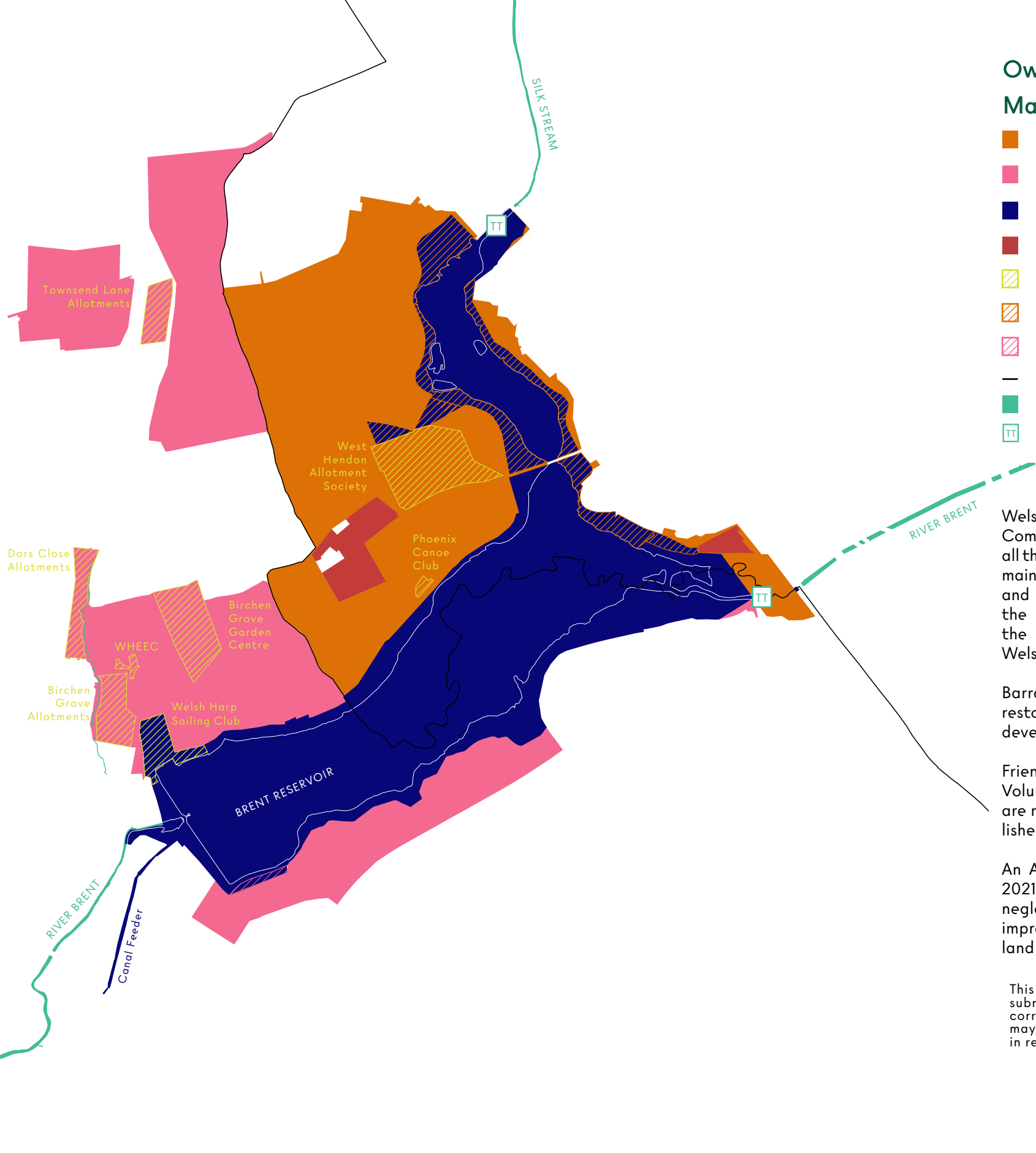
Environment Agency have statutory and regulatory responsibilities for the Silk Stream and River Brent. Although land owners alongside the Silk Stream and River Brent have riparian responsibilities, the EA manage trash traps and hoyle booms along the rivers.

Welsh Harp Sailing Association manage the sailing base; and lead on managing floating vegetation within the reservoir.

Thames 21 manage the Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre, following a Community Asset Transfer, 2016. They also carry out wider conservation work monthly.

Allotments are managed by individual plot holders and their organisations.

The Welsh Harp Conservation Group, a volunteer organisation, manage hides and lead conservation work.



## Ownership and Management

- LBBarnet Freehold
- LBBrent Freehold
- Canal and River Trust Freehold
- Private Freehold
- Leased land
- Leased to LBBarnet
- Leased to LBBrent
- Borough Boundary
- River
- Trash Trap

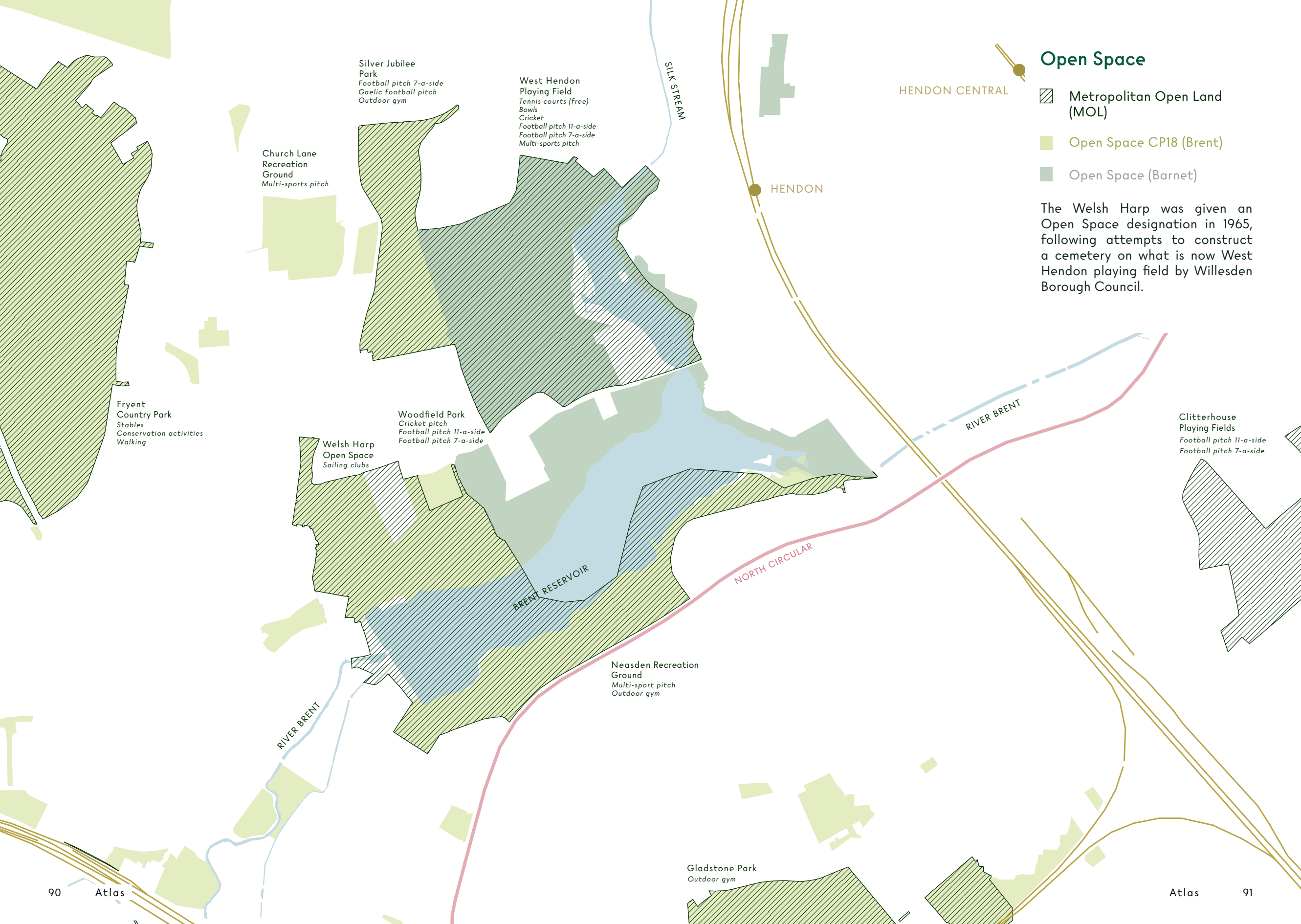
Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee consider and co-ordinate all the interests of recreation, leisure, maintenance, nature conservation and the statutory requirements of the British Waterways Board and the Environment Agency at the Welsh Harp.

Barratt PLC are responsible for restoring marshland adjacent to development.

Friends of the Welsh Harp - Volunteer litter-picking sessions are regularly arranged, since established in 2015.

An Action Alliance was started in 2021 by local campaigners to reverse neglect and encourage future improvement from land owners and land managers.

This map was produced from data submitted by the CRT, and whilst correct in the extents of ownership, may contain omissions or inaccuracies in respect to leaseholders.



## Open Space

-  Metropolitan Open Land (MOL)
-  Open Space CP18 (Brent)
-  Open Space (Barnet)

The Welsh Harp was given an Open Space designation in 1965, following attempts to construct a cemetery on what is now West Hendon playing field by Willesden Borough Council.

**Silver Jubilee Park**  
 Football pitch 7-a-side  
 Gaelic football pitch  
 Outdoor gym

**West Hendon Playing Field**  
 Tennis courts (free)  
 Bowls  
 Cricket  
 Football pitch 11-a-side  
 Football pitch 7-a-side  
 Multi-sports pitch

**Church Lane Recreation Ground**  
 Multi-sports pitch

**Fryent Country Park**  
 Stables  
 Conservation activities  
 Walking

**Welsh Harp Open Space**  
 Sailing clubs

**Woodfield Park**  
 Cricket pitch  
 Football pitch 11-a-side  
 Football pitch 7-a-side

**Neasden Recreation Ground**  
 Multi-sport pitch  
 Outdoor gym

**Gladstone Park**  
 Outdoor gym

**Clitterhouse Playing Fields**  
 Football pitch 11-a-side  
 Football pitch 7-a-side



## Nature Conservation

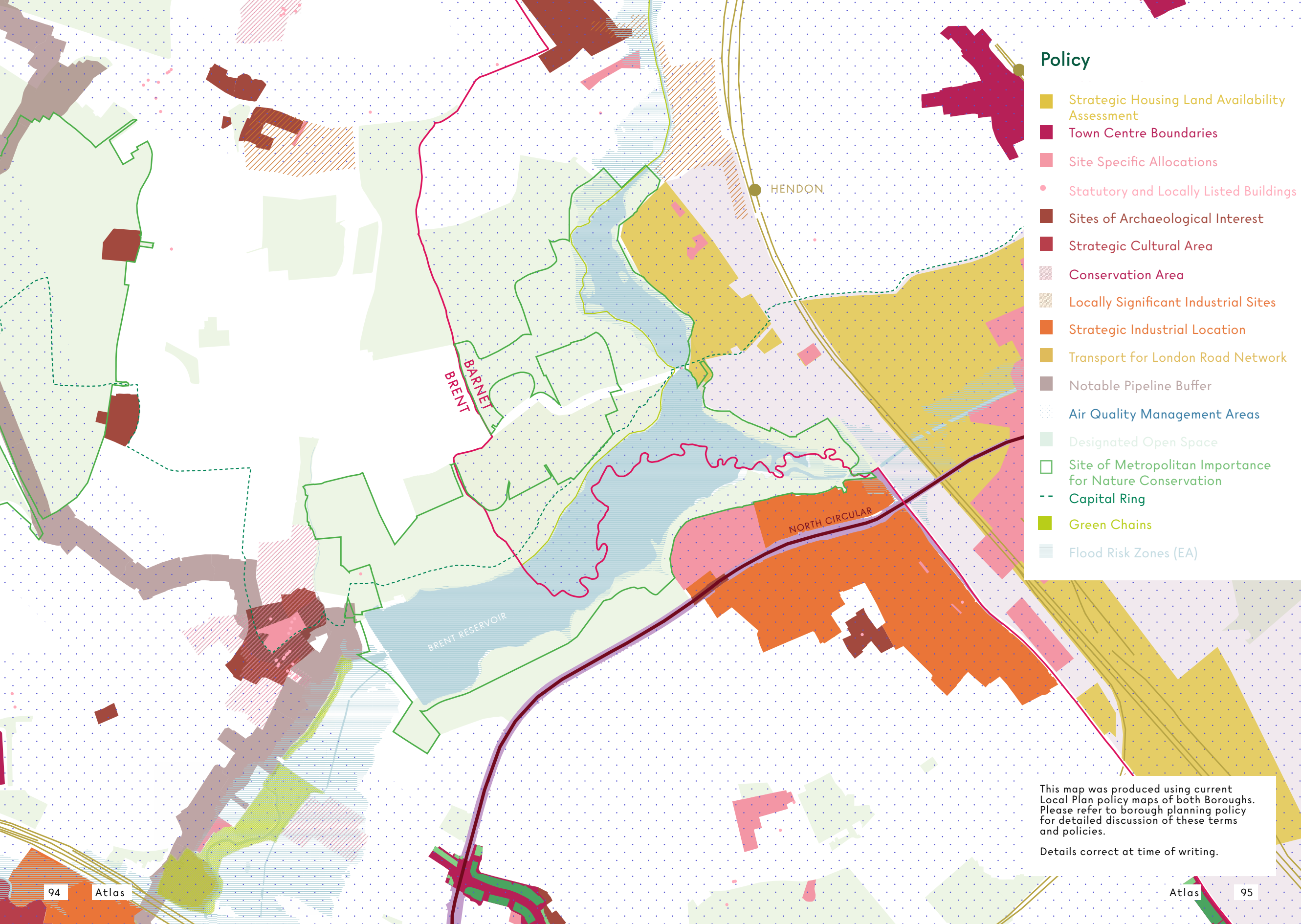
- Local Nature Reserve
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- ▨ Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation
- ▨ Site of importance for Nature Conservation (Local)
- ▨ Site of importance for Nature Conservation (Grade I) (Brent)
- ▨ Site of importance for Nature Conservation (Grade II) (Brent)

The open water and surrounding marginal habitat was designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1950, to preserve the reservoirs breeding wetland birds, and the variety of plant species growing along the water margin.

This designation restricts the management of the designated area, with written consent from Natural England required for any operations taken.

The Welsh Harp has been identified as a regionally important Site of Metropolitan Importance (SMI) for Nature Conservation in the Local Plans of the London Boroughs of Brent and Barnet, using assessment criteria set by the GLA. This covers the water and much of the open space surrounding it. This designation is used for planning purposes.

The Welsh Harp was designated as a statutory Local Nature Reserve in 2005, a much larger area than that designated as an SSSI.



## Policy

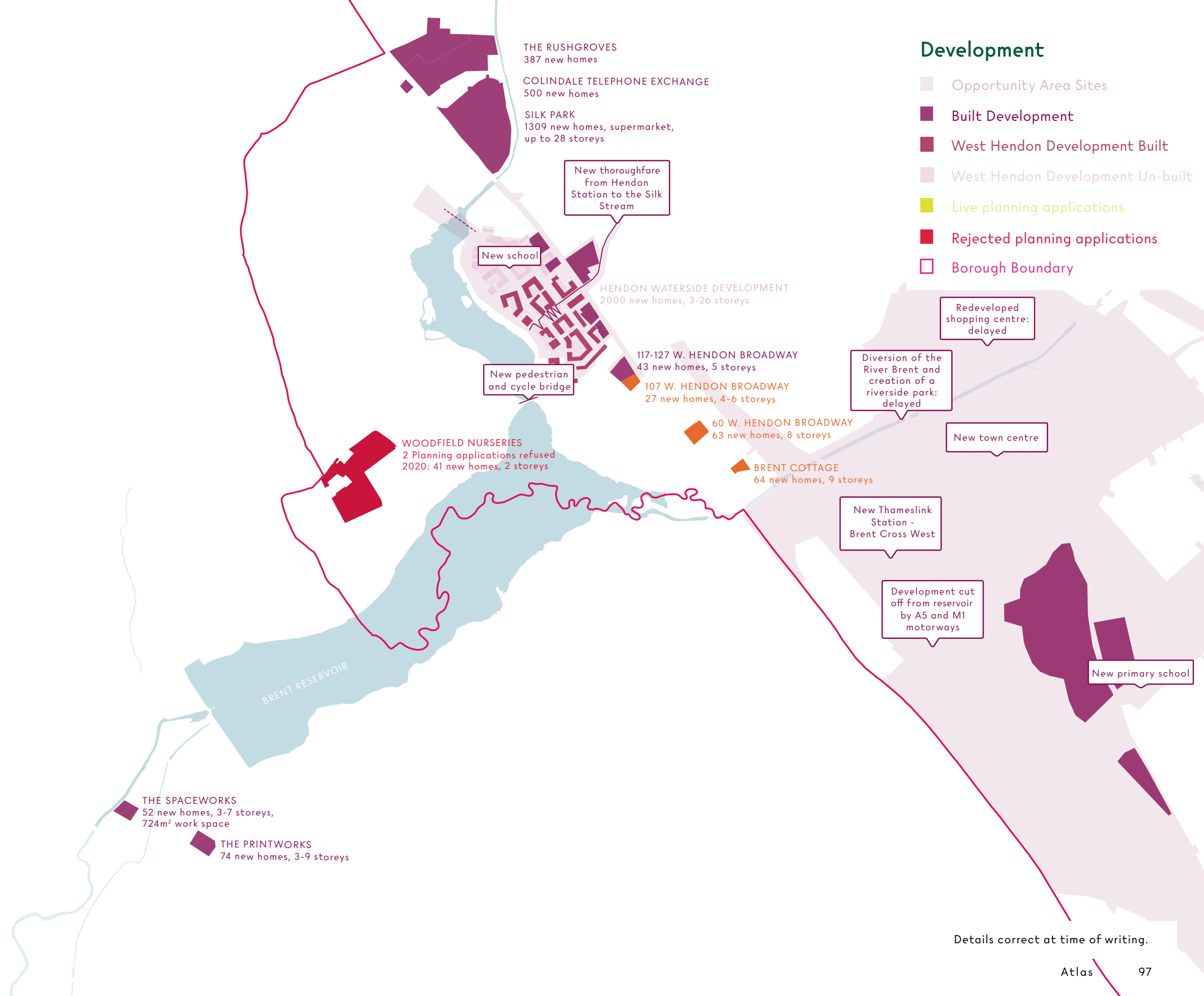
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment
- Town Centre Boundaries
- Site Specific Allocations
- Statutory and Locally Listed Buildings
- Sites of Archaeological Interest
- Strategic Cultural Area
- Conservation Area
- Locally Significant Industrial Sites
- Strategic Industrial Location
- Transport for London Road Network
- Notable Pipeline Buffer
- Air Quality Management Areas
- Designated Open Space
- Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation
- Capital Ring
- Green Chains
- Flood Risk Zones (EA)

This map was produced using current Local Plan policy maps of both Boroughs. Please refer to borough planning policy for detailed discussion of these terms and policies.

Details correct at time of writing.

## Development

- Opportunity Area Sites
- Built Development
- West Hendon Development Built
- West Hendon Development Un-built
- Live planning applications
- Rejected planning applications
- Borough Boundary



Details correct at time of writing.

# Access & Connections

The Welsh Harp is a rare, large body of water, only six miles from central London. Understanding access to the Welsh Harp can help us to understand the role which the Welsh Harp plays in connecting the wider green & blue network. There is an important opportunity to embed the reservoir into its surroundings through its connections and entrances.



## Communities

The Welsh Harp is the only large water body of its kind in the area. The reservoir sits between Neasden and West Hendon, just six miles from central London. It is separated from Neasden by London's North Circular Road and West Hendon. It lies adjacent to the huge Brent Cross and Cricklewood Regeneration area. The reservoir is separated from the development by the Edgware road, M1, the Midland Lane Railway Lane.

routes. Several underground and over-ground train lines serve the Welsh Harp from within a short walk. Car parking is provided at the West Hendon playing fields and Birchen Grove car park, and is available in some nearby roads.

## Access

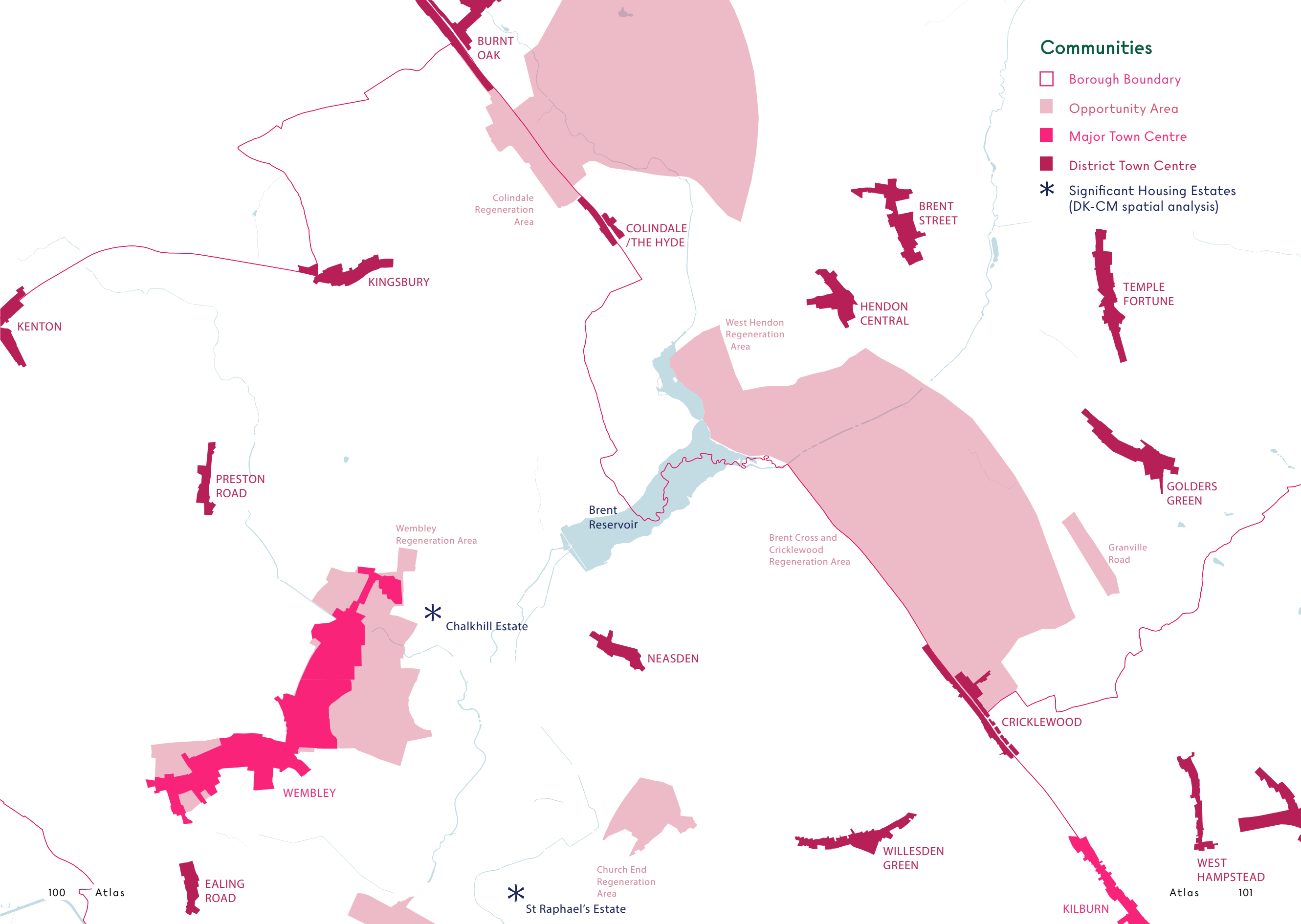
There is 24 hour access to all the open spaces surrounding the reservoir, with numerous access points. The site can be accessed from nearby residential areas, but is also well-served by bus

Some parts of the reservoir, such as the East Marsh lack formal routes, and can be overgrown, muddy and impassable. The North Marsh has a public hide that is always open, whilst access to the two hides overlooking the East Marsh requires a key, that is obtainable through the Welsh Harp Conservation Group. The Capital Ring, a 72 mile route around London runs along the western edge of the reservoir.











# Communities

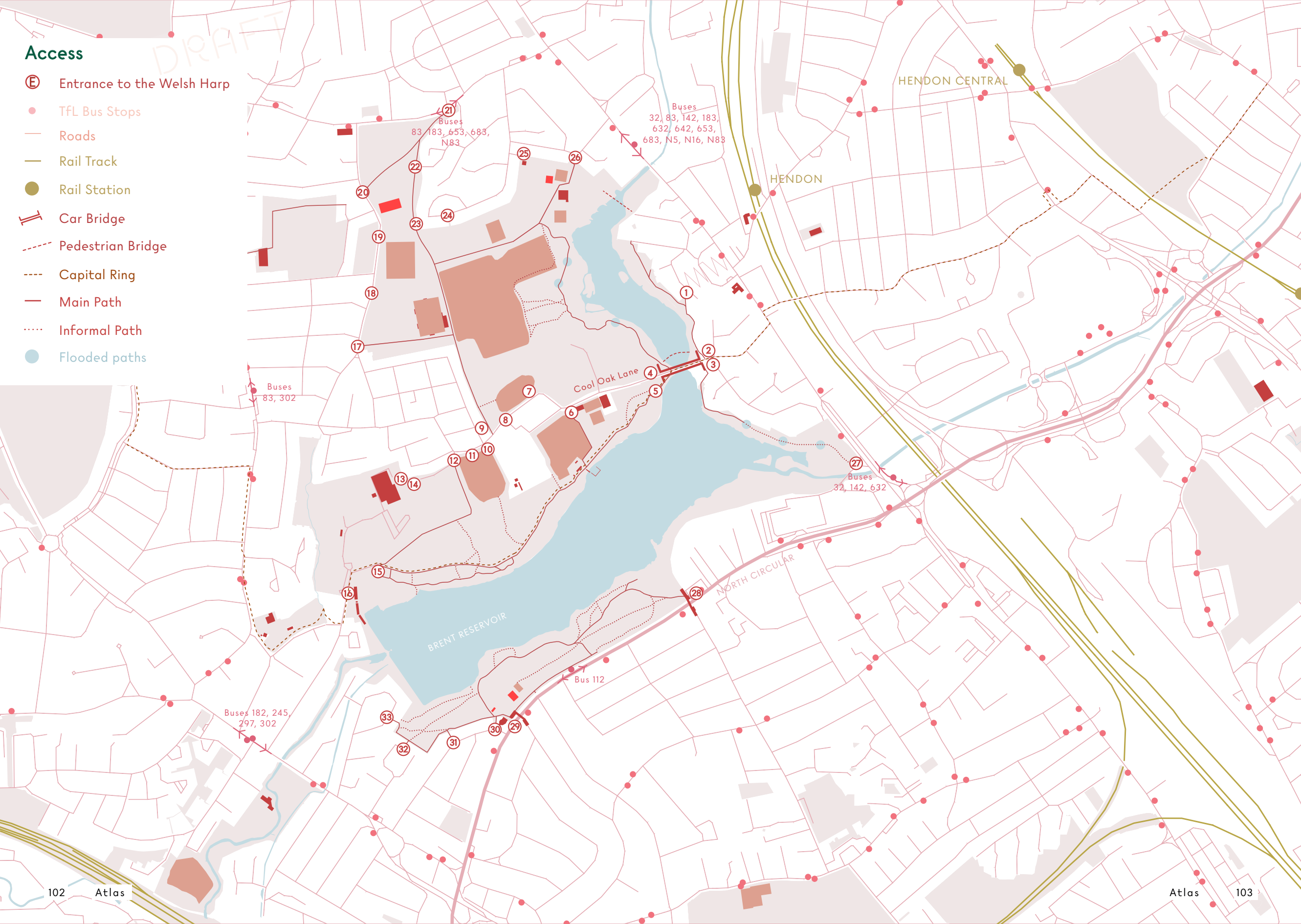
-  Borough Boundary
-  Opportunity Area
-  Major Town Centre
-  District Town Centre
-  Significant Housing Estates (DK-CM spatial analysis)



DRAFT

### Access

-  Entrance to the Welsh Harp
-  TfL Bus Stops
-  Roads
-  Rail Track
-  Rail Station
-  Car Bridge
-  Pedestrian Bridge
-  Capital Ring
-  Main Path
-  Informal Path
-  Flooded paths



## Cool Oak Lane Entrances, 1- 16

Entrances from Cool Oak Lane are not well-signposted and do not give a structured or clear sense of where one is and what one can access in the place, or that one is passing through the Welsh Harp. Signage is neglected and orientation is difficult when the reservoir is not visible.



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## Northern Entrances 17-26

Views across open space to the North of the site, make orientation from the entrances clearer. Passages between housing leading to the Open Ground are wide and open. There is very little signage.



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## Southern Entrances, 27 - 33

These entrances are vital access points for local residents living in housing to the South of the reservoir, some of which sit within areas with a deficiency in Access to Open Public Space.

The North Circular Road obstructs pedestrians walking from Neasden to the Recreation Ground. Two bridges provide access over the road, 26-27. Other entrances are passageways between houses. They are unsigned and easy to miss.

# Activity & Resources

The reservoir's open spaces are well used for informal recreation, including local and regional walks, cycling, picnicking, visiting the bird hides, tending allotments and sports. In addition, there are several formal clubs and associations providing education, team sports and access to watersports.

## Open and Growing space

The Welsh Harp has been a vital growing space for surrounding communities since the 1920s, with four allotments within its boundaries. West Hendon Allotments on the western side of the reservoir, are self-managed by the West Hendon Allotments Association. Townsend Lane Allotments, Dors Close Allotments and Birchen Grove are managed by LBBrent.

## Social Infrastructure

Watersport:

- The Welsh Harp Sailing Association was formed in 1953, as an umbrella organisation for various sailing clubs on the Welsh Harp. This includes Wembley Sailing Club, Sea Cadets, Regatta Safety Boat Services and Phoenix Canoe Club. The club offers dinghy sailing, windsurfing, racing and RYA training, offshore yachting, children's and family sailing and a social programme. Their programme runs throughout the year.
- Phoenix Canoe and Outdoor Centre was set up in 2004, following the closure of the Youth Sailing Base by Barnet Council, on what is now the Hendon Waterside development. There are plans to expand their premises.

Sport:

- Hendon Rifle Club is situated on the former Normal Powder Company's grounds and was inaugurated in 1906. They offer an outdoor range, a series of enclosed gallery ranges and a heated clubroom. They are open on Saturdays and Sundays.
- Princes Park Youth Football Club is a long established football club providing affordable coaching to young people. Their open-air football pitches are available to hire.
- Hendon Football Club, formerly named 'Christchurch Hampstead' was founded in 1908. The club previously shared facilities with Wembley FC and Harrow borough FC, before moving to Silver Jubilee Park in 2016.
- The CRT Community Roots Officer co-ordinates a programme of guided events at the Welsh Harp, including Let's Walk and Let's Bird Watch.

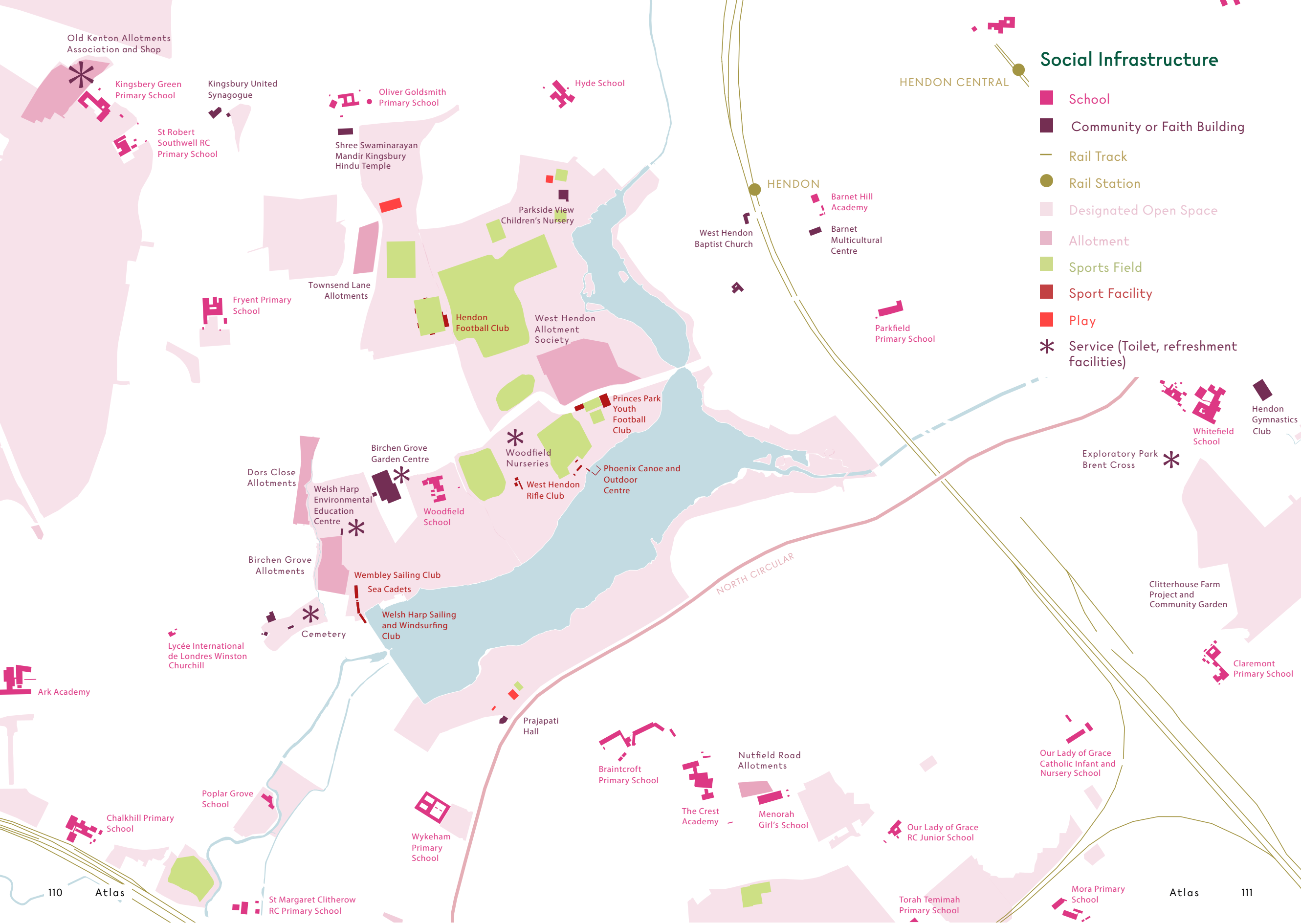
Education:

- Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre has been located on the North-West of the site since 1973, providing opportunities for young people to use the Welsh Harp for environmental education. It historically provided regular wildlife walks for local schools and other users. The centre has been managed by Thames 21 since 2016, with spells of closure due to funding issues.
- Welsh Harp Conservation Group formed in 1972 to observe and protect the habitats around the reservoir. Since 1976 they have provided monthly wildlife walks.



## Resources

Local suppliers, businesses, material sources and related assets have also been mapped to explore how local supply chains may play a role in the future of the Harp.



## Social Infrastructure

- School
- Community or Faith Building
- Rail Track
- Rail Station
- Designated Open Space
- Allotment
- Sports Field
- Sport Facility
- Play
- ✱ Service (Toilet, refreshment facilities)

Old Kenton Allotments Association and Shop

Kingsbery Green Primary School

Kingsbury United Synagogue

Oliver Goldsmith Primary School

Hyde School

St Robert Southwell RC Primary School

Shree Swaminarayan Mandir Kingsbury Hindu Temple

HENDON

HENDON CENTRAL

Barnet Hill Academy

Barnet Multicultural Centre

Townsend Lane Allotments

Parkside View Children's Nursery

West Hendon Baptist Church

Fryent Primary School

Hendon Football Club

West Hendon Allotment Society

Parkfield Primary School

Princes Park Youth Football Club

Woodfield Nurseries

Phoenix Canoe and Outdoor Centre

Dors Close Allotments

Birchen Grove Garden Centre

Woodfield School

West Hendon Rifle Club

Exploratory Park Brent Cross

Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre

Cemetery

Wembley Sailing Club

Sea Cadets

Welsh Harp Sailing and Windsurfing Club

Lycée International de Londres Winston Churchill

Ark Academy

NORTH CIRCULAR

Clitterhouse Farm Project and Community Garden

Claremont Primary School

Poplar Grove School

Wykeham Primary School

Braintcroft Primary School

Nutfield Road Allotments

The Crest Academy

Menorah Girl's School

Our Lady of Grace Catholic Infant and Nursery School

St Margaret Clitherow RC Primary School

Torah Temimah Primary School

Mora Primary School



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- 1. Silver Jubilee Park
- 2. West Hendon Playing Fields
- 3. York Park
- 4. Welsh Harp Open Space
- 5. Woodfield Park
- 6. Shrike Field
- 7. Neasden Recreation Ground



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- 1. Townsend Lane Allotments
- 2. West Hendon Allotment Society
- 3. Dors Close Allotments
- 4. Birchen Grove Allotments



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- 10. Phoenix Canoe and Outdoor Centre
- 11. Welsh Harp Sailing Clubs
- 12. Hendon Rifle Club
- 13. Prince's Park Youth Football Club
- 14. West Hendon Football Club
- 15. Welsh Harp Environment Education Centre
- 16. Birchen Grove Garden Centre
- 17. Prajapati Hall



## Resources

- Local manufacturer
- Local service
- Material source
- Green Space Other

- ① KK- hardware building suppliers
- ② AM Glass and Mirror
- ③ ESB Flooring
- ④ Kingsbury Windows
- ⑤ Millenium- crane hire
- ⑥ Crystal Units- glass merchants
- ⑦ Busy Bee- builders merchants
- ⑧ Hunter- machinery hire
- ⑨ EUROS-stone supplier
- ⑩ Imperial Marble-stone supplier
- ⑪ Pelican Group- leather workers
- ⑫ Lumanor- lighting wholesaler
- ⑬ Stanmore- road construction
- ⑭ Selco- building materials supplier
- ⑮ Eurocell- building supplier
- ⑯ Major- timber supplier
- ⑰ Flooring centre- flooring suppliers
- ⑱ Alliance- tool hire
- ⑲ Wolseley- plumbers merchant
- ⑳ Roofing supply shop
- ㉑ Electric wholesaler
- ㉒ Cricklewood - glass merchant
- ㉓ GMS- metal fabricator
- ㉔ JJ- roofing supplier
- ㉕ BM- plumbers merchant
- ㉖ FCC waste management
- ㉗ Brent scrap-metals recycling
- ㉘ Ground skips- waste management
- ㉙ Capital- concrete supplier
- ㉚ CEMEX- concrete supplier
- ㉛ Builder Depot- builder suppliers
- ㉜ London reclaimed brick merchants



# Engagement Findings

## Introduction

Engagement is a central part of the Joint Vision process. A bespoke approach has been adopted which aims to be wide-reaching in terms of the communities and demographics around the Welsh Harp whilst also benefiting from the in-depth knowledge and activity of many local groups, campaigners, activists and experts.

In order to engage widely, an engagement form, reaching people through local mail-drops, the CRT website, google form and extensive social media, was created and shared. Between September and October 2021 this generated 155 responses including from residents associations and local groups. In addition, 11 young people were deliberately engaged in the form of a workshop.

In order to benefit from the detailed and profound local knowledge of the Strategy Group itself and from local activists and campaigners such as the Welsh Harp Conservation Group and the Friends of the Welsh Harp, a separate engagement strand, the 'Welsh Harp Joint Atlas' was initiated, beginning with a workshop and facilitated through ConceptBoard and Whatsapp. This allowed local experts and activists to ensure that the project team's mapping and understanding of the Welsh Harp is accurate and up to date, and also yielded further engagement findings. A final workshop was held with the Strategy Group.

This report provides findings, analysis and samples from the whole engagement activity, divided as follows:

### The Welsh Harp Today

Presents a summary of findings about what is valued about the Welsh Harp today as well as current and recent issues.

### The Welsh Harp Tomorrow

Presents a summary of ideas, recommendations proposals and desires for the future of the Welsh Harp.

### Key Themes

Presents an analysis of the key themes emerging from the full engagement exercise, organised by theme as the beginning of the process of developing the final Joint Vision.

# The Welsh Harp Today

## The Welsh Harp is valued for:

- Nature conservation and biodiversity
- Accessing, experiencing and learning about nature, including birdwatching and environmental education (for all, not just for school-age children)
- Access to open space, wilderness, feeling of space, respite
- Access to spaces not available locally elsewhere, such as secluded waterside spaces 'off the beaten track'
- Community-building and related activity, such as making and meeting friends during dog walks, childminder groups, retired walking clubs
- Community groups, such as organised rubbish clearance
- Running, walking and jogging
- Sailing, as an activity and as a spectator
- Providing access to sailing and related activities, especially through the work of the Sea Cadets and Phoenix Outdoor Centre
- Its combination of social and natural history
- Allotments and growing space - there is a long waiting list

## There are issues with

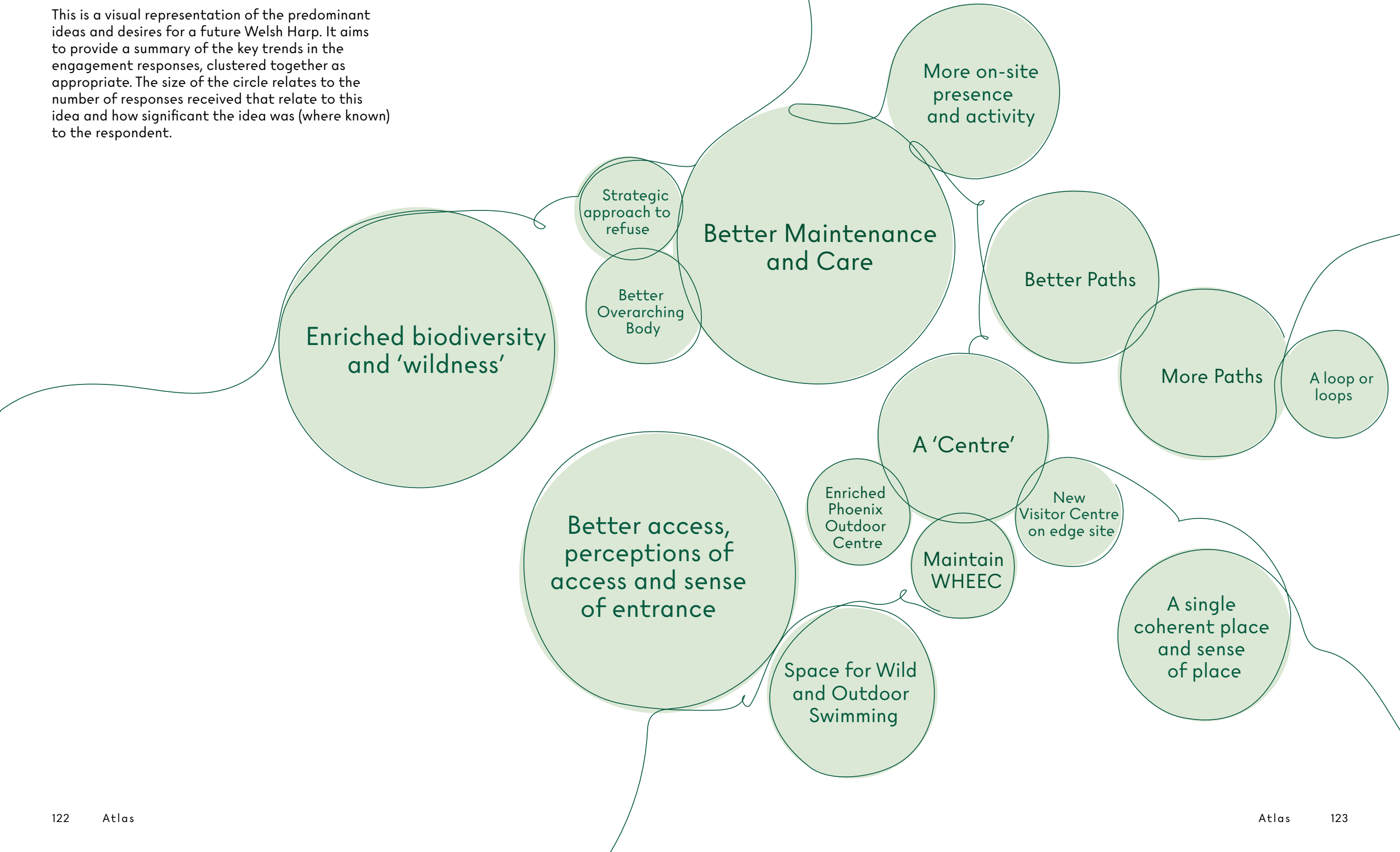
(in approximate order of significance)

- Decreasing biodiversity and species decline, including birds, hedgehogs, amphibians
- Upkeep and maintenance, exacerbated by lack of overarching and joined-up working between boroughs and other responsible organisations, and arising in part from the area's complex ownership and management context
- Poor management of habitats and perceived misallocation of budget and resources. Breeding rafts - at north and eastern marshes - in a poor state of repair and not serving their purpose
- Health and quality of water, including awareness of algae blooms and pollution from adjacent factories and businesses
- Major issues with ineffective 'trash traps' from watercourses entering the reservoir
- Rats and other pests, particularly as they are encouraged by individuals aiming to feed birds (location at western end of Cool Oak Lane is particularly bad for this)
- Refuse, including number of bins, regularity of emptying, lack of dedicated dog poo bins and related issues
- Poor access and multiple barriers to entry
- Poor local knowledge of the location and how to access it
- Specific physical and perceptual barriers to the site from the wider area, including bicycle access from the south due to the North Circular

- Lack of a 'centre' (the Environmental Education Centre is missed)
- Water logging of paths making otherwise good routes inaccessible
- Lost views, such as of Wembley Stadium
- Spaces that ultimately make up the Welsh Harp feeling (and being) disconnected from each other, decreasing access and limiting feelings of ownership and engagement
- Informal camps and camping, including the homeless
- Tensions between plant life and appropriate wind for sailing at the western end of the Harp, perceptions of tree encroachment on views and open space
- Fly-tipping, including at Cool Oak Lane lay-by
- Lack of life-rings and safety equipment
- Unlicensed fishing, particularly as this can be a major health hazard for wildlife populations
- 'Heron Hide', built to observe herons and other birds, frequently inaccessible and unusable
- Drug usage due to isolated nature of the place
- Car parks feeling unsafe and unmonitored
- Noise from adjacent roads
- Motorised boats
- Cyclists and e-scooter users can dominate paths
- Vandalised and damaged hides and infrastructure
- Barbecues and open fires
- Car parking and management/enforcement activity
- Perceptions of safety due to no CCTV and poor lighting
- Traffic, narrow width of Cool Oak Lane and lack of traffic-calming measures
- Preservation of overgrowth - don't 'tidy up' too much
- Maintenance of pavement along Cool Oak Lane - to preserve safe width
- Quality of interpretation and information boards is poor/out of date
- Invasive species
- Concern with how the space will cope with increased residential populations
- Perceptions of over-rigorous tree removal at Neasden Recreation Ground

# The Welsh Harp Tomorrow

This is a visual representation of the predominant ideas and desires for a future Welsh Harp. It aims to provide a summary of the key trends in the engagement responses, clustered together as appropriate. The size of the circle relates to the number of responses received that relate to this idea and how significant the idea was (where known) to the respondent.



## Ideas from multiple respondents

The following is a summary of ideas and themes that were suggested by multiple respondents:

- **BETTER MAINTENANCE AND CARE** – including a strategic approach to refuse dredging, draining and silt removal
- **ENRICHED BIODIVERSITY AND 'WILDNESS'** – effort needed to recognise, enhance and expand existing habitats, provide new ones intelligently and increase the biodiversity of the site as a whole. Removing invasive species also crucial to this
- **BETTER PATHS** – consistently good, accessible paths along key routes, including boardwalks where appropriate, with lighting to improve after dark safety
- **MORE PATHS** – especially to create a coherent 'loop' or loops around the reservoir of paths for walkers and/or cyclists, and to enhance pedestrian use of places which are currently antisocial behaviour or camping hotspots. Eastern Marsh a key location for improvement
- **BETTER ACCESS, PERCEPTIONS OF ACCESS AND SENSE OF ENTRANCE** – better integration of the Welsh Harp into the wider area, including strategic routes e.g. the Capital Ring and connections to public transport
- **A STRONGER OVERARCHING BODY** - responsible for the Welsh Harp management and with strong stakeholder representation
- **A CENTRE** – a space providing shared amenity for visitors and the diverse users of the Welsh Harp, and that brings people together. This might be an enhancement of existing facilities, reopening lost ones, or something new. Ideas for facilities included toilets, a wildlife study centre, adult education, community rooms, a climbing wall, a restaurant/ café/'chippy'/tea room, and a terrace for views
- **SPACE FOR WILD AND OUTDOOR SWIMMING** – perhaps utilising a 'beach-style' form of access, though many respondents noted that there are live public health issues with this idea. This idea was particularly popular among Google Form respondents
- **A SINGLE COHERENT PLACE AND SENSE OF PLACE** – 'the Welsh Harp', not multiple places, thereby dealing with lack of clarity in terms of naming, perception, access and making a place that all neighbouring communities and demographics can feel a part. Ideas included the creation of a 'Welsh Harp Country Park'
- **MORE ON-SITE PRESENCE AND ACTIVITY** - including appointed wardens, resident caretakers, ecologists
- **BETTER SIGNPOSTING** - including of routes and distances
- **BETTER AND MORE SEATING** - including sheltered seating
- **BETTER ON-SITE INTERPRETATION AND INFORMATION** - including notices, public information campaigns, information on historical and natural history, current events, including at site edges and in the wider area. One respondent noted the importance of using appropriate, natural materials for this signage
- **BETTER AND MORE PUBLIC INFORMATION CAMPAIGNING AND RELATED ACTIVITIES** – particularly to address issues with rodent infestations and birds eating bread due to well-intentioned bird-feeding activity
- **BETTER, MORE TRANSPARENT, STRATEGIC ALLOCATION OF FUNDS**- and developer contributions, in line with eventual Joint Vision principles
- **BETTER ENVIRONMENTS AND FACILITIES FOR SPORT** - Individual examples included better amenity for running, tennis courts in existing parkland (various locations) and an outdoor gym at the current Barratt site compound
- **ABANDON OR SUBSTANTIALLY MODIFY THE PLANNED (AND CONSENTED) WEST HENDON FOOTBRIDGE** proposals due to their impact on SSSI habitats
- **DIVERSIFIED USES MORE IN LINE WITH THE HISTORIC 'PLEASURE GARDEN' AT THE WELSH HARP** - among them formal landscaping/ gardens with flowers, leisure boating (like at Regents or Hyde Park), space and facilities for concerts and events
- **A SAFER COOL OAK LANE** - ideas ranged from traffic-calming measures, ensuring pavement widths are maintained, through to closing except for access or for al private vehicles
- **BIRDWATCHING OR WILDLIFE TOURS** – connect this private activity with wider public(s)
- **DEDICATED SPACE FOR PICNICS** - (including at West Hendon Playing Fields) , potentially including facilities for safe barbecues

## Ideas from individual respondents

The following is a summary of other ideas provided by individual or isolated respondents. Some of these are a detail or particular view of more widely-held ideas summarised above.

- Stronger midweek uses, esp. on water, education activity
- Dedicated ecologist (LB Barnet) and/or park ranger/on the ground management activity
- Better play facilities, such as at Birchen Grove
- Strategic connection to enhanced Brent Cross
- Public restaurant at the 'dam' end of the reservoir
- Noise mitigation, especially along North Circular
- Clarity around naming and purpose of certain green spaces, e.g. at Woodfield Park
- Public art to create a welcome
- Permitted areas for fishing
- Awareness of changing Flood risk (2.77)
- North Marsh more opened up, key views and access enhanced
- Better visual promotion of Hendon Football Club
- Events programming e.g. an open day at the playing fields, a 'Welsh Harp Festival'
- Personal (licensed) kayak usage on the reservoir, potentially accessed via pontoon
- Indoor pool
- Extend Ultra Low Emissions Zone (ULEZ), which currently stops just short of the Welsh Harp
- Stronger enforcement action including fines (of businesses, fly-tipping)
- Bring the former St. Andrew's Church (Listed building 118867) into the landscape and in so doing enhance connections to wider Kingsbury area
- Limit public use and visitor numbers for the sake of preserving wildlife populations/habitats
- Dedicated space for dog walking, and/or acknowledgement of responsible dog owners using the harp for dog walks
- Reinvigoration of rowing at the Welsh Harp; ideas included: collaboration with British Rowing (reinvigorate previous failed attempts), school access to rowing, a Community Rowing Club

## Conflicts

The following is a summary of potential conflicts and tensions that may exist within respondents' ideas and thoughts:

- Potential tensions between opening up views and enabling access to the shoreline with maintaining and encouraging habitats
- Strong popular desire for wild and/or outdoor swimming conflicts with current water quality and pollution, and is currently not allowed at the site
- There are many uses on the site that are illegal or challenging to some other communities, among them fishing, barbecues, dog walking. Solutions to some of these challenging uses range from greater enforcement or restriction through to creating dedicated space for some of these activities, acknowledging that they 'won't go away' regardless of greater enforcement. Finding an appropriate course of action here is potentially challenging and divisive.
- Some respondents sought a return to 'Pleasure Garden' or park-style activities on the Welsh Harp, such as pleasure boating and more formal gardens. Though with strong historical precedent on the site, these uses may conflict with the highly-valued wild nature of the site.

# Key Themes

## Biodiversity & Ecology

### -->Vision: Biodiversity/Water

Significant effort is needed and desired by significant numbers of respondents to recognise, enhance and expand existing habitats of the SSSI and beyond, and to begin by recognising the complexity, diversity and richness of habitats made since the 1980s. Only some respondents recognise that the biodiversity of the Welsh Harp is somewhat threatened or challenged at present, but the presence of this biodiversity is uniformly valued and celebrated and should be at the heart of all proposals for the site.

Ideas for this include:

- Enriching the diversity and complexity of species: plants, birds, wildlife
- Recognising and repairing existing habitats, including through dredging, silt removal, rubbish clearance and multiple approaches to the cleaning of water
- Create new habitats
- Removing invasive species and developing a management approach
- Mitigating noise impact, especially from the North Circular, noise from which impacts on habitats but also on human enjoyment of the place
- Developing a strategic approach to ensure that wildlife habitats are not negatively impacted by human uses

'The wildlife, water and the areas of wilderness: they're what make the Welsh Harp special and not just a park'

'It has always been delightful to have such a wonderful lake nearby. Our children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren have always enjoyed the duck and geese and overall wildlife.'

'It is widely known that the Welsh Harp itself has not been dredged for many years, and should be as a priority. The build up of silt has had a negative impact on water quality and fish stocks.'

'The Welsh Harp is a SSSI and conservation of wildlife in the northern marsh (by restricting public access) is essential.'

## Movement

### -->Vision: Access & Movement

Beyond simply accessing the site and the amenities within it, a strategic approach is needed to routes and paths across the landscape, providing proper routes for pedestrians and cyclists and the right balance between movement and dwelling. Preserving the SSSI's particular character and sense of wildness and openness is also a key consideration here.

- Better paths - careful consideration of surfaces, widths, materials and maintenance to ensure these are maintained
- A coherent 'loop' or loops around the reservoir allowing people to travel all the way around, either for leisure or for specific running routes, triathlons etc.
- A strategic approach to cycling and where this is appropriate
- A safer Cool Oak Lane

'We need some lamps on the main path... it feels unsafe when its dark.'

'It would be great to have a walking route around the whole of the reservoir.'

'It would be awesome if there were more benches near the waterline allowing quiet enjoyment of the Harp and its wildlife.'

'When it rains for long periods the path can be really muddy and impassable with a pushchair or wheelchair.'

'Our very best walks are from the lovely new bridge across Cool Oak Lane, across the road and along the trail, past the canoe club, stopping to meditate at the water's edge ...'



## Access

### -->Vision: Access & Movement

Access is about the literal, physical capacity of all to access the place, but also about perceptions of access and how the place is connected - or not connected - to the wider area. Improving the accessibility of the site in both these senses is a significant priority for local people, but in a way that preserves its particular character and sense of wildness and openness.

- A sense of arrival and clear entrances
- Enhanced access to nature for people, both locals and from the wider area
- Greater opportunities to learn about nature and the natural environment, including birdwatching as a specific activity but also environmental education for all (including, but not limited to, school age children)
- Better connections to the wider area, especially to strategic routes. Each boundary or entrance should be considered in terms of how well it creates accessibility for all.
- A clear, coherent wayfinding and signpost strategy,, reassuring people of destinations and distance
- Better and more seating, including sheltered seating, acknowledging that the capacity to rest is a function of movement for many people
- Access to open space, wilderness, feeling of space, respite
- Access to spaces not available locally elsewhere, such as secluded waterside spaces 'off the beaten track'

'I live about 2 or 3 miles south of the Welsh Harp, but I rarely visit (despite loving it) because it's so hard to access by bicycle from the south of the borough.'

'Access is difficult - largely unmarked and unclear whether areas are public or private. Indeed, until I saw the map I did not appreciate that there is access close to The Hyde, only 5 minutes walk from our house.'

'I suggest a better link up with Fryent Country Park would be helpful as this is much better known.'

'Embrace the ancient and historic Old Church of St Andrew, said to be the oldest building in Brent.'

'A fantastic wildlife and sailing area in a built up area of London. I love being there, watching the birds, being in the boat - it is quiet, meditative, accessible.'

## Identity & History

### --> Vision: Identity & Heritage

The Welsh Harp is highly valued by many local people, its stories are of relevance to wide audiences across London and surrounding counties and it is a significant place in the history, development and character of the multiple neighbourhoods that it intersects with. This should be consolidated and celebrated, whilst acknowledging that this valuing is not as widespread as it could be.

This theme is partly about naming and a sense of place. The Welsh Harp place is, today, made up of multiple names and places and even the name of the reservoir is somewhat conflicted - Brent Reservoir or Welsh Harp? But the issue is not just about naming, it is also about an 'on-the-ground' sense of the Welsh Harp as a single place, something which is desired by many respondents but currently challenging due to gaps in access and connectivity and by confusing name structures, and also exacerbated by the complex ownership and local authority boundaries.

- A single coherent place and sense of place - 'the Welsh Harp'
- Could we create a 'Welsh Harp Country Park'?
- Clarity around naming and purpose of certain green spaces, e.g. at Woodfield Park
- Public art to create a welcome
- Better visual promotion of Hendon Football Club (and indeed of other significant, beloved sports and leisure clubs and associations across the Welsh Harp area)
- Events programming - festivals and celebrations, temporal activities

'A priority must be to create a distinct identity, within which all the parts flourish. The area needs to have a clear name, even your title (The Welsh Harp/ Brent Reservoir) seems to display uncertainty.'

'The origin and history of the Welsh Harp are amazing.'

'Historic events took place here, like early plane flights.'





## Knowledge & Education

### --> Vision: Knowledge

The Welsh Harp is strongly valued as a place to explore nature and the environment, and it has never been more urgent that the population at large is educated about, and engaged in, issues of nature, wildlife, climate, biodiversity and the environment. The Welsh Harp has historically, through initiatives like the Environment Centre, been significant locally for providing this sort of knowledge - both to school-age children and to wider communities.

There should also be greater public knowledge of the Welsh Harp and its existing qualities and amenities. To complement this there is a need for more effective and impactful public information to address some of the more challenging behaviours that take place. There is a need for on-site interpretation and signage, a coherent approach to social media and communications in the wider area and London-wide, and a greater public sense of the role, purpose and quality of the reservoir and the challenges it faces, also including its role in managing flood risk.

- Environmental education as a key theme across the site - bringing people and nature into closer contact
- Better on-site interpretation and information - including notices, public information campaigns, information on historical and natural history, current events, including at site edges and in the wider area.

- Better and more public information campaigning and related activities – particularly to address issues with rodent infestations and birds eating bread due to well-intentioned bird-feeding activity

'[We need] more appropriate signage to identify length of walks and items to note, birds, trees etc.'

'There should be more education about feeding the birds and not leaving litter.'

'Information boards are missing or graffitied. Notice boards are in a poor state.'



## A Centre

### --> Vision: A Centre

The Welsh Harp contains club houses, social facilities, schools, allotment spaces and other spaces and venues. There remain however strong calls for a stronger public 'centre' containing diverse facilities, to act as a source of information, a place to dwell & access goods and services, an information hub and provider of facilities. This might be an expansion in the role & provision of existing facilities (e.g. the proposed expansion of the Phoenix Outdoor Centre), a revitalised Environmental Education Centre or a new provision at a new site. If the latter, sites situated close to the water but on the border of the Harp and the wider area are popular.

- Ideas for facilities include toilets, a wildlife study centre, adult education, community rooms, a climbing wall, a restaurant/café/'chippy'/tea room, and a terrace for views.
- Suggestions for location included at the current Barratt site compound, at any/all edges of the site to reduce impact on habitats, expansion of existing facilities such as the Sailing Club or Phoenix Outdoor Centre
- Multiple respondents noted that development of new facilities must not be detrimental to habitats or existing open spaces

'Having a coffee bar would be a great bonus.'

'It would be great if the Phoenix could get the building they are planning.'

'It's a shame there are no toilets available.'

'In particular, the potential of the Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre is vastly under-realised. This centre is hugely important to many generations who have attended and recall their experiences of learning about the natural environment.'



## Governance

### --> Vision: Governance & Oversight

There is a widespread sense that more joined-up and overarching governance and management of the Welsh Harp site is required, with some respondents noting positive recent moves in this direction, including the development of the Joint Vision. There was a strong sense among some respondents that some initiatives in recent years have been inappropriate, non-strategic or misguided, for example the Silk Steam bridge and some allocation of West Hendon developer contributions, and that protecting and enhancing the SSSI has not been enough of a priority in recent spending and management.

Ideas for this include:

- A stronger overarching governance and management body
- Support and collaborate with existing local groups and campaigns who make a strong positive contribution to the Welsh Harp and are significant advocates for change and improvement
- Better, more transparent, strategic allocation of funds and developer contributions,
- Stronger enforcement action including fines (of businesses, fly-tipping)

'The Welsh Harp is not equally maintained between the boroughs.'

'The social connectivity of the Welsh Harp site is dire with communities fragmented around its boundary, limiting cohesive action towards the combined improvement of habitats and amenity, and understanding for protecting sensitive areas.'

'Increase coordination and collaboration between Barnet and Brent councils in arranging a joined up and proactive management of this key green space.'



## Care & Maintenance

### --> Vision: Care

Rubbish, cleanliness, fly-tipping and general care and maintenance are significant issues for a huge number of respondents, with many respondents linking maintenance issues with wider perceived governance issues. Some respondents acknowledged positive recent activity in this regard and the clear role of local community and campaigning groups in rubbish clearance was also noted and valued. Multiple respondents seek more on-the-ground staff to patrol, warden and maintain the site.

Key issues to address include:

- Refuse - more, better bins, better collection regimes, dedicated dog poo bins, education campaigns, CCTV coverage for fly-tipping hotspots, reverse vending machines; incentive schemes, and a targeted approach to tackle hard-to-reach spots that are difficult for community groups to reach)
- More on-site presence and activity - including appointed wardens, resident caretakers, ecologists



'The Friends of the Welsh Harp perform a very valuable voluntary service in trying to clean up the litter.'

'After every heavy rain storm you can literally watch the litter washing in from the rivers and spreading throughout the reservoir. On several occasions we have had to assist wild birds who have found themselves caught up in litter.'

'It's so neglected and polluted. The birdlife has to wade between sewage and shopping trolleys.'

'It's been neglected, that is clear for all to see, and speaking as a member of a local volunteer group, the amount of litter we pick up is very concerning.'

'A park-keeper or similar could be employed.'

## Sport & Leisure

### --> Vision: Sport & Recreation

Ever since it was created, the Welsh Harp has provided space for leisure and sport activity, it has a strong reputation for these activities and they are also valued not only by those who participate but also by spectators and other users.

Better facilities requested include:

- Running tracks and routes (linking to the idea of a coherent loop around the site)
- Tennis courts
- Outdoor gym on the West Hendon periphery of the site
- Play equipment, though this was a surprisingly limited request
- Wild and outdoor swimming was a very popular request, though many respondents acknowledge current health and safety issues with this activity.
- Personal license kayak use
- Reinvigoration of rowing at the Welsh Harp, requested by British Rowing, the national governing body for rowing in the UK

Birdwatching and engagement with wildlife are also leisure activities, both by committed birdwatchers but also potentially as a way of increasing access and awareness among the wider population, such as through wildlife or birdwatching tours.

Multiple respondents desire uses and spaces within the Welsh Harp which are more closely related to the history of the site as a 'pleasure garden' than to its current status and character (though they don't necessarily know about this

association themselves!). Among these uses and spaces are flower gardens and more formal landscaping, pleasure craft, and spaces for concert and performance.

'The Welsh Harp and its sailing clubs are well-known and highly regarded nationally, and sailors come here from other clubs to take part.'

'It is a lovely stretch of water to have the sailing clubs, who also look after the site, keeping an eye on things.'

'We love the vibrant community spirit around the Welsh Harp, the dog walkers, the mum and baby groups, the retired walking clubs and the childminders who meet around the harp for a walk and a catch up.'

'Given the rise of outdoor swimming, it would be fantastic if swimming was once again allowed in the lake.'

## Sharing

### --> Vision: Care

Sharing and managing different uses is a key theme, as is managing some of the more challenging uses of the place. An approach to each use in turn that appropriately balances them across the site will therefore be required. The most significant balancing of uses is between human activity across the site - of all types - and the preservation and enhancement of wildlife habitats. Achieving the correct balance of this will be crucial to the development of a Joint Vision for the site.

- Picnics lead to significant littering and to illegal barbecuing - do they need to be enforced against or dedicated space(s) provided?
- Fishing, swimming, dog walking and play are all uses that conflict with other uses and/or are not permitted - do they, individually, need to be enforced against or dedicated space(s) provided for them?
- Respondents note that the reservoir as a water body and space of education is currently underused on a typical term-time week - is this a chance to introduce new uses without disruption?
- Engagement with local religious institutions - the water plays a role in the religious practices of some local people.

'A balance should be struck between the needs of the wildlife and needs of people enjoying healthy sports.'

'I think the key is to provide better community facilities without destroying the wild character of the park.'

'When I was younger you could do fishing there. It's a shame they don't allow it [today] with a permit or Environment Agency rod license as there are not many places for people to go in the area.'



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## **WELSH HARP STRATEGY GROUP**

Matthew Gunyon (London Borough of Barnet)  
Kelly Eaton, Leslie Williams (London Borough of Brent)  
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## **DK-CM**

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Cristina Monteiro

## **JCLA**

Jonathan Cook, Natalie Simmons

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