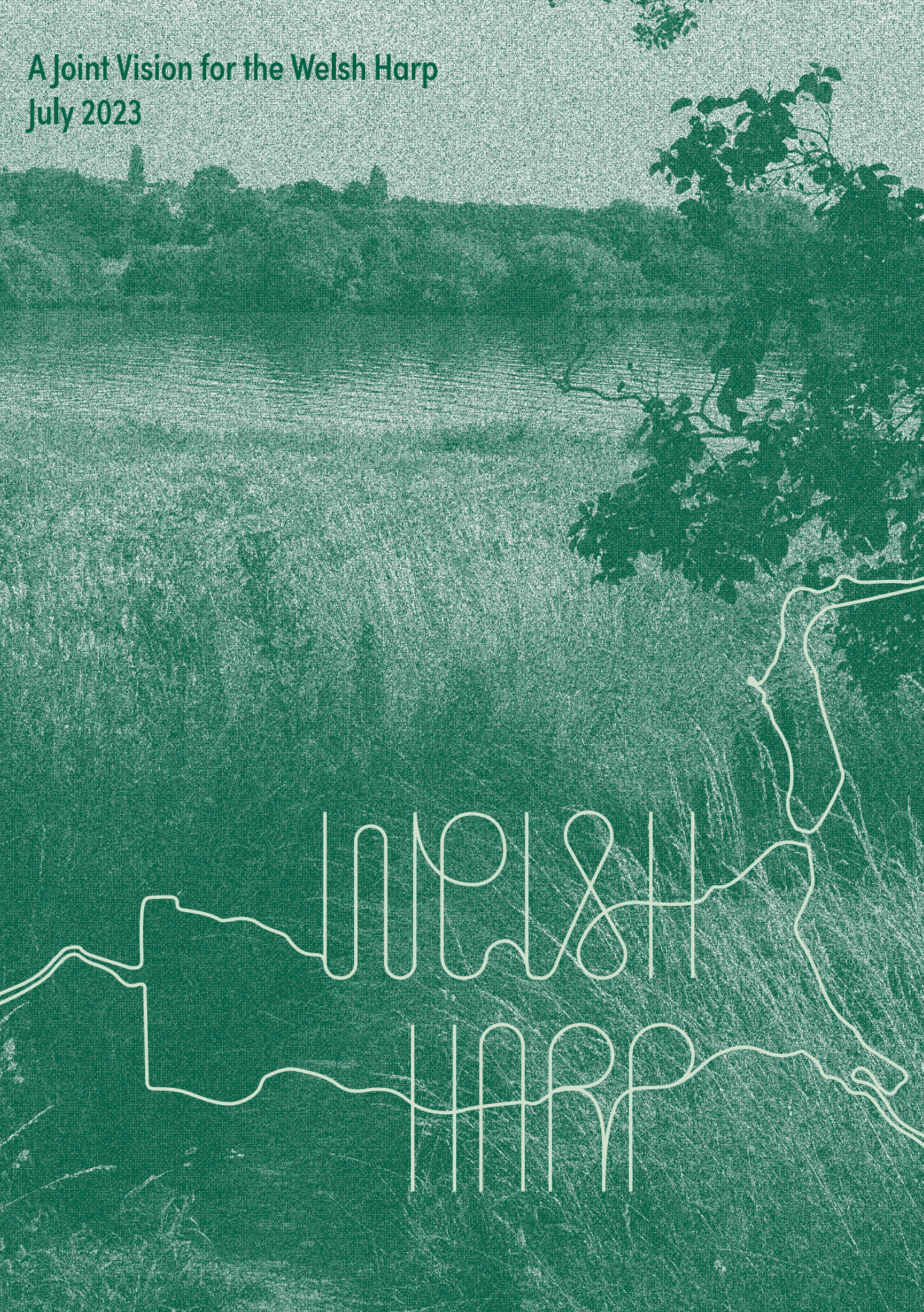


A Joint Vision for the Welsh Harp
July 2023



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.

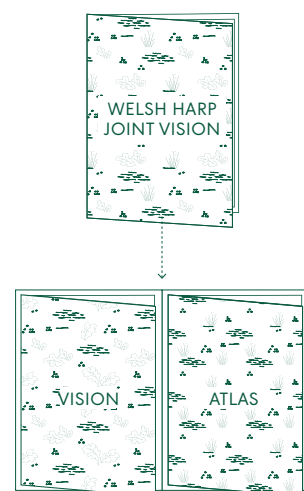
The Vision is presented in two parts, Vision and Atlas.

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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Vision



The Vision

One of London's most significant urban wild places, the Welsh Harp is a vital place to connect with nature. The site provides Londoners with a highly particular offer, combining biodiversity, sport, recreation, health and wellbeing and heritage.

The Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at the heart of the site will be properly cared for and maintained, creating an exemplar urban wildlife habitat, wild and natural, which carefully balances people's access and the needs of wildlife populations whilst providing a rich and congruous variety of aquatic ecosystems and habitats. The conservation and enhancement of the SSSI and Local Nature Reserve will build upon the substantial conservation efforts of diverse individuals and organisations, and recent 'joined-up' working by the various bodies and groups will be expanded and consolidated to build a collaborative, open process of change and conservation.

The Welsh Harp will be easily accessible to its surrounding communities and well-connected to both its local context, and to the wider city. Diverse people from across London will visit to connect with nature, access excellent sports, recreation and educational activities, to come together as a community, and to learn about the natural environment. Outstanding facilities will be available to host and promote these activities, managed and facilitated by a unified and accountable management structure.

This Vision will be fulfilled through a series of principles grouped under the themes PLACE, ENVIRONMENT, WELLBEING and INCLUSION.

*What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,
O let them be left, wildness and wet;
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.*

- *Inversnaid*, Gerald Manley Hopkins, 1881

*'None of these places are in the
countryside proper, nor where they
intended to provide bed and board
for wildlife. They are all habitats
which have grown out of human
need...in them, the labels 'urban'
and 'rural' by which we normally
find our bearings in a landscape,
just do not apply'*

- *The Unofficial Countryside*,
Richard Mabey, 1973

*Out into the outskirts edges
Where a few surviving hedges
Keep alive our lost Elysium
– Rural Middlesex again.*

- *Middlesex*, John Betjeman, 1954

The Vision captures the uniqueness of this landscape within London – an 'inner meets outer' space where the dense city meets wider suburbia, with country connections offering the opportunity for direct engagement with wildlife in a highly particular natural setting shaped by water. This is drawn from an understanding of the context and setting of the Welsh Harp, which can be summarised as:

Physical geography

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

Social history

The development of the Welsh Harp as a valued and vital green space for the city has been reflected in its social history - from its origins as a place for 'fresh air and fun' and pioneering outdoor activity from cycling and water sports to aviation, to flowering as an ornithologist's paradise, to the urban wild space it is today.

Identity

The Welsh Harp's location in the former county of Middlesex is a key influence on its landscape character and setting; fragments of the original tapestry of land use can still be seen in the pattern of development today, with remnants of hedge lines, streets aligned to old field boundaries, and preserved open spaces.

Urban nature

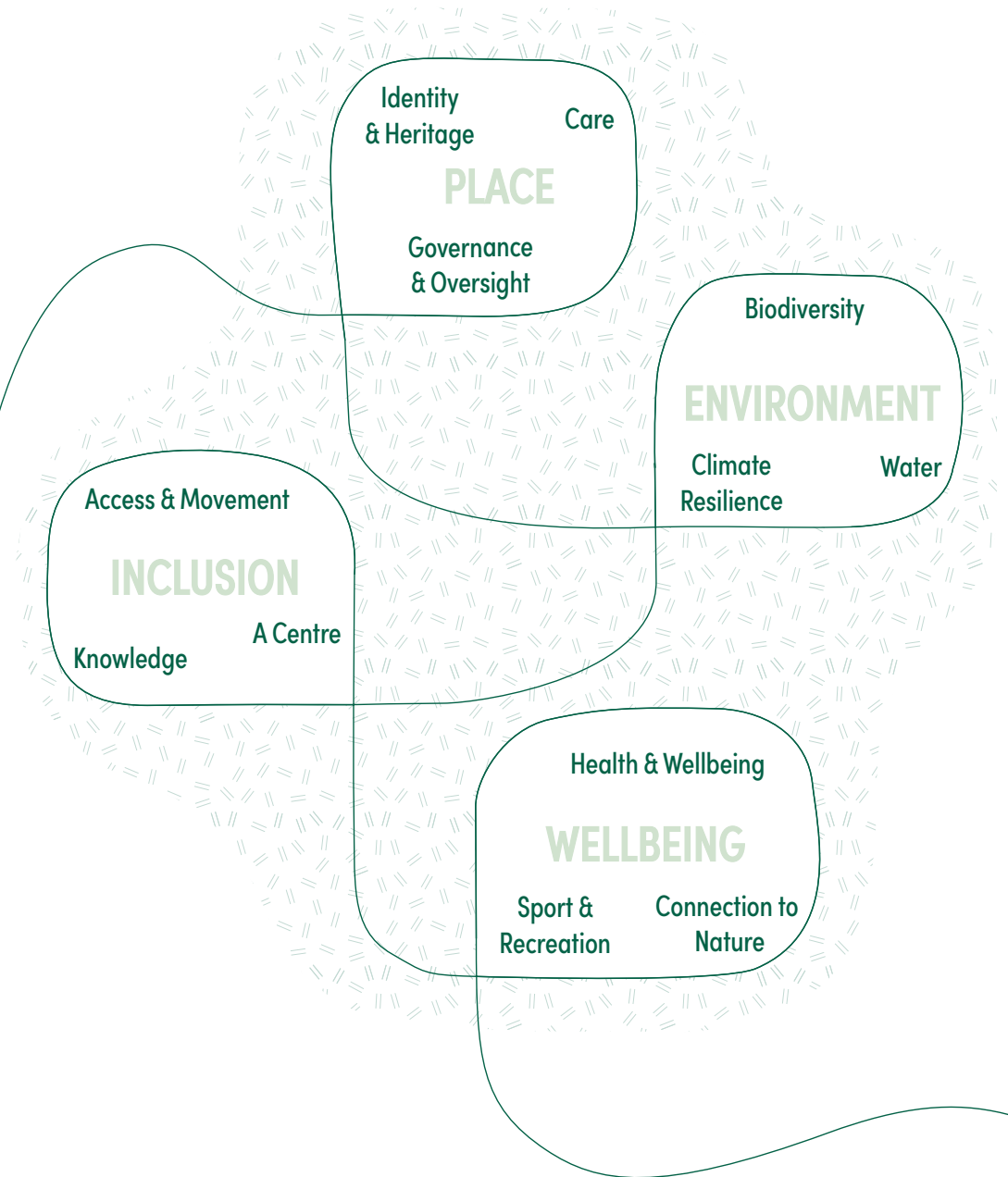
The story of the reservoir reflects the development of working countryside and agricultural land towards urban & recreational development – extensive modification of natural watercourses into a constructed reservoir for the purpose of water supply to the Grand Union Canal. The importance of the everyday or commonplace ecologies on site cannot be overstated – these often form the building blocks supporting the rare and protected habitats or species on site. Often, our first encounters with these commonplace species – sparrows, foxes, dandelions – are what sparks our interest in the natural world. It is vital that these are valued, understood, and given a home alongside the notable species for which the SSSI is designated.

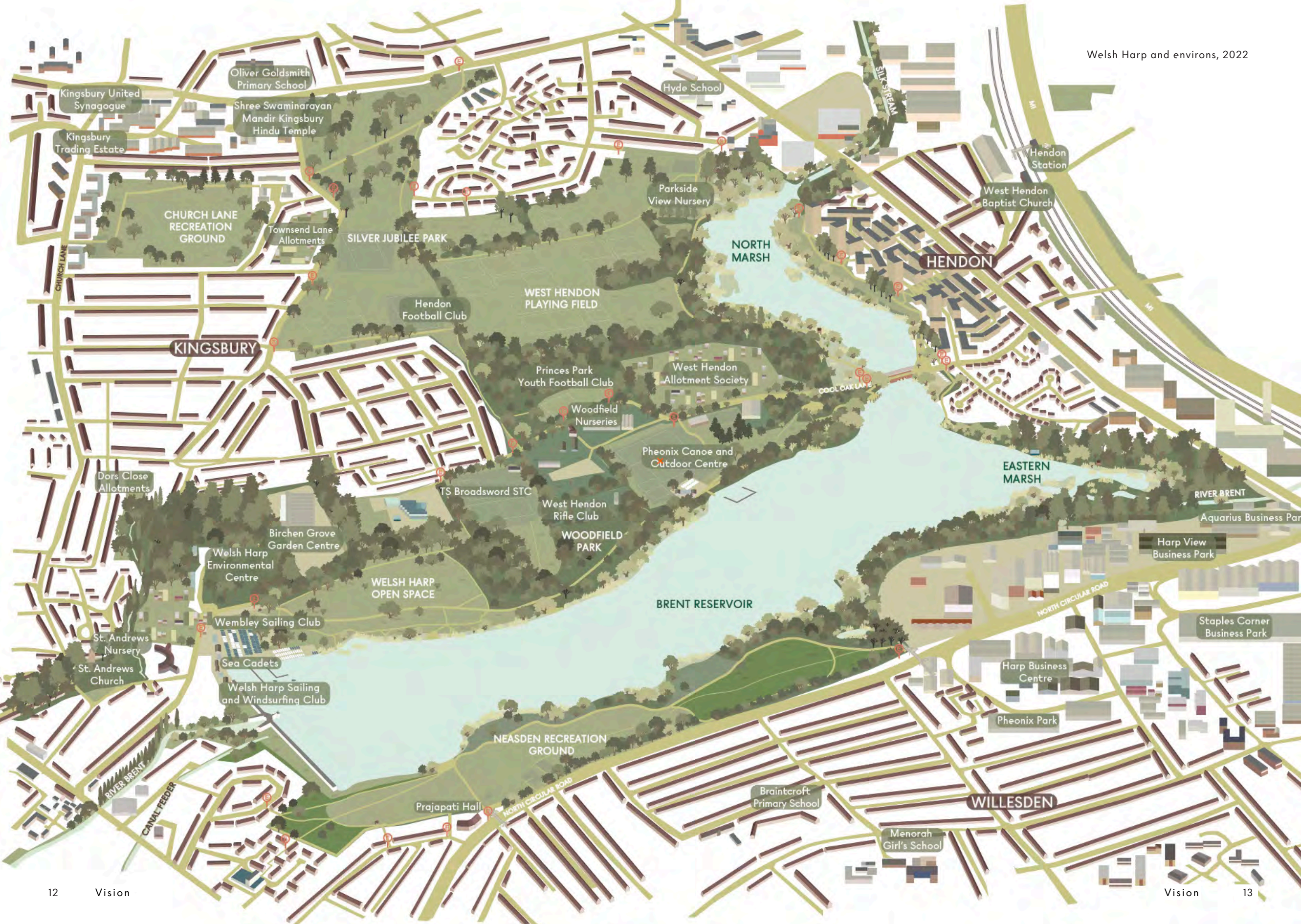
This contextualisation is supported by our understanding of what the Welsh Harp is valued for today, uses which mix urban life and recreation with access to wilderness, open space and natural history.

Four Themes

The Vision is divided into four overarching themes, with sub-themes within them. These form a suite of detailed principles that if followed will deliver upon the Vision set out. They build upon the key themes developed through public engagement --> Atlas: p.118-137.

These themes have also been developed in reference to the All London Green Grid priorities.





Place

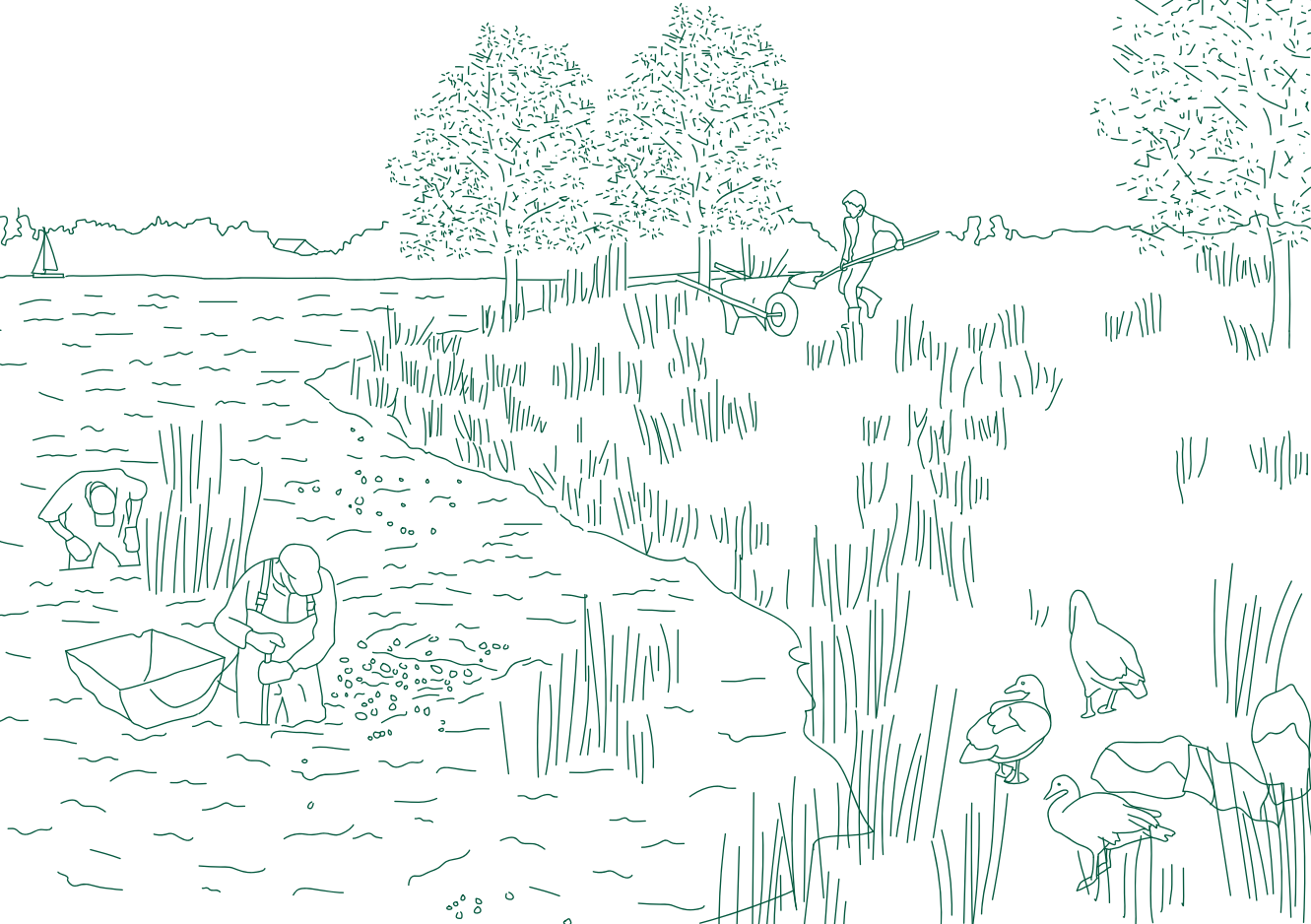
The Welsh Harp is a unique place and one of London's most significant urban wild spaces. It offers rare opportunities to connect 'wild nature' to an urban population, whilst celebrating a particular and special character. Current issues with care, governance and oversight need to be tackled in a way that is joined-up, strategic and inclusive in order to allow it to thrive as a place.

It is also important to establish the Welsh Harp as a coherent place in its own right with a clear sense of identity and clear lines of responsibility. A wider sense of the site's history and cultural meaning is crucial.

Principles for the future of the place are subdivided into:

- Care
- Governance & Oversight
- Identity and Heritage





Care

A new spirit of care is needed - from the responsible authorities but also amongst the general public - in order to tackle pervasive issues of rubbish, dumping, damage to habitats, noise & light pollution and fly-tipping. Ultimately we must change the way the site is perceived and approached, so it becomes a place that is valued and cared-for by all parties, in a way that is appropriate to its SSSI status, and which does not allow environmental degradation as a result of pollutants and rubbish from upstream.

Currently the 'lack of care' embodied in fly-tipped objects and rubbish has a major impact on wildlife and environmental quality but also on perceptions of the Welsh Harp as

a whole - it can feel like an unloved space on the edge of the city. A paradigm shift is needed toward a place that feels safe and is cared-for, encouraging a feeling of collective ownership by those who use the place.

To achieve this, the following is proposed:

P1 Implement a unified and strategic approach to pollutants and refuse entering the site from upstream, including collaboration and joined-up working with responsible authorities and other strategic initiatives to ensure that any efforts on-site are not frustrated by materials, objects and pollution entering the site from upstream. Strategic initiatives include the Silk Stream Flood Resilience Innovation Project as well as the Catchment Monitoring Co-operative on the Dollis Brook.

P2 Establish a unified approach to bin types and collection schedules, to avoid perceptions that some areas are more 'cared-for' than others. Locations of bins should be carefully chosen in response to local need and also modifiable over time.

P3 Consider incentive schemes ('a coffee for a bin bag'), reverse vending machines, located at centres of activity and site edges.

P4 Create more on-site presence, activity and passive surveillance - including appointed wardens or resident caretakers, with a clear sense that infractions are captured and responded to. Enforcement should as far as possible focus on encouraging positive behaviours.

P5 Boost and make visible education and public information campaigning.

P6 Boroughs to explore steps to reduce fly-tipping and other antisocial behaviour; mitigation measures might include enhanced CCTV coverage along Cool Oak Lane fly-tipping hotspots.

P7 Build upon and support existing community activity in relation to clearance and litter picking, including targeting areas that are hard or impossible for community groups to access or tackle and promoting the creation of community champions who reach out to other communities and act as ambassadors.

P8 Ensure that any changes to the Welsh Harp do not have damaging impacts in terms of light pollution and night-time activity.

Precedent - Russia Dock Woodland and Stave Hill Ecology Park are natural areas that were formed by filling in and re-planting the former docks. Stave Hill is now managed by The Conservation Volunteer's Urban Ecology team as a nature reserve, educational facility, research area and place of recreation. The Park is managed to form a mosaic of grassland, woodland, scrub and wetland habitats.





Governance & Oversight

The various bodies, authorities responsible for the Welsh Harp, together with the wider communities of conservation groups and friends, should build upon recent successful collaboration to form an organisation, such as a Trust --> Atlas: p.88-89. This body should exist to focus on, and advocate for, the Welsh Harp.

A body along these lines should be transparent, clear and accountable, with clear lines of communication with the various responsible bodies. It should be responsible for creating and implementing a holistic management plan, and have enhanced ability to fundraise, advocate for the Welsh Harp with partners, and collaborate with other

partners, for example the RSPB, local arts organisations and so on.

There is a need to address both conservation and evolution in the management of the Welsh Harp. There is strong precedent in the local area of management techniques that promote productive uses in open spaces, whilst maximising value for wildlife. Specific, low-impact techniques can support a wide range of diverse habitat types, enhancing biodiversity value and offering potential for working groups to engage with the management of the spaces in a direct way.

To achieve this, the following is proposed:

P9 Establish a trust or similar organisation which acts as a single visible, identifiable, legible and accountable advocate for the Welsh Harp, operating under the governance of local authorities, landowners and the existing Consultative Committee. Such a trust would seek to be a consultee in all planning applications impacting upon the Welsh Harp and its environs.

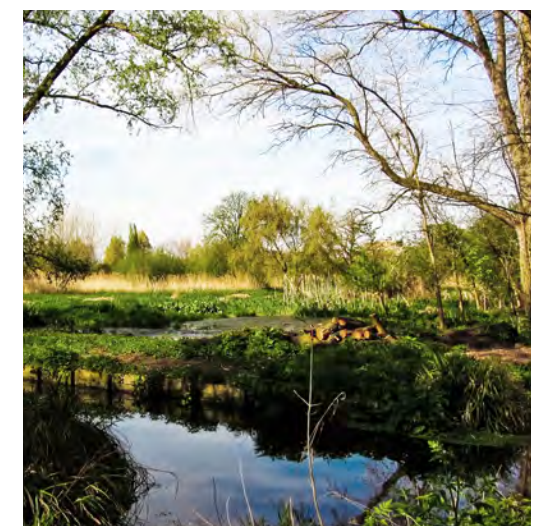
P10 Create an updated management plan for use going forward, with implementation and continuation overseen by a dedicated role and with clear targets agreed and disseminated.

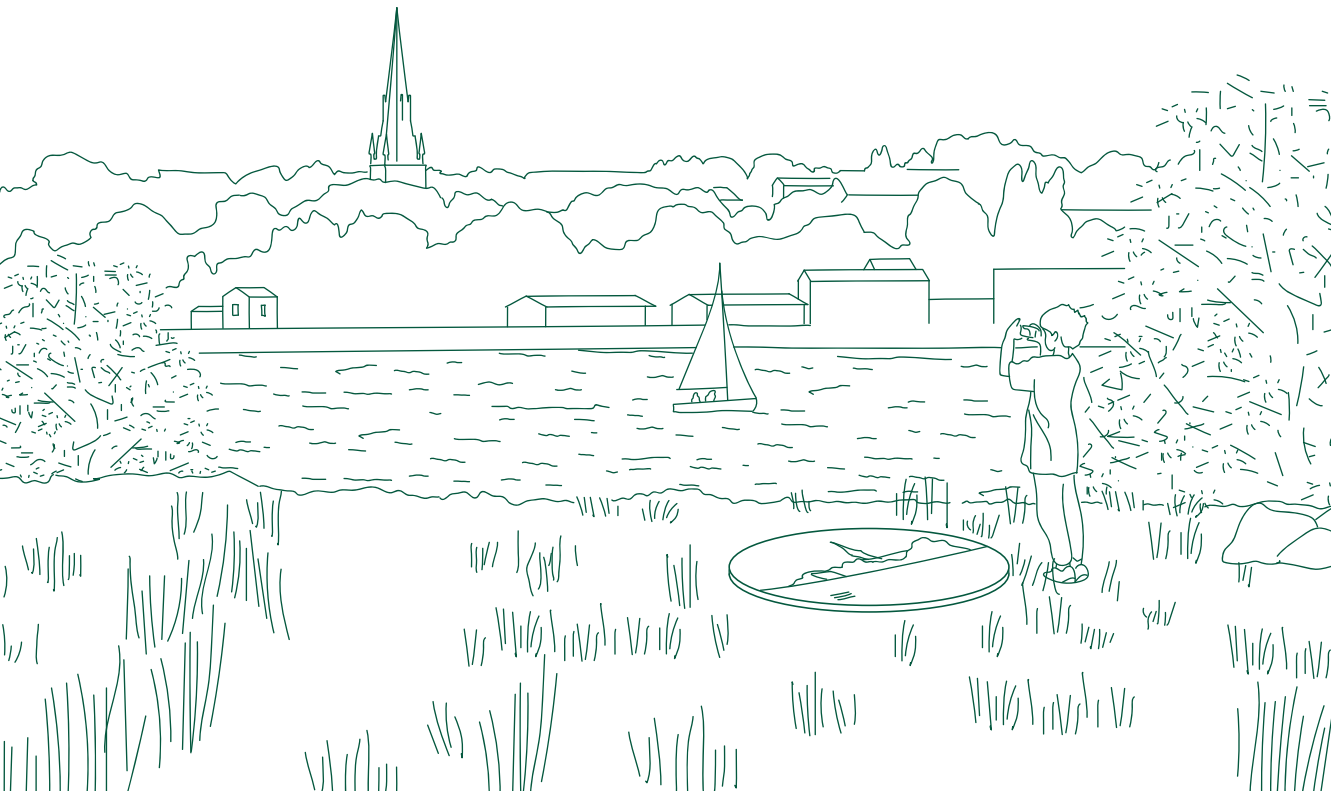
P11 Build collaborations and shared working with existing local groups and campaigns, building capacity to, for example, create a local circular economy and share knowledge & information.

P12 Explore a dedicated park ranger or similar role, ideally employed by the Trust, with responsibility for custodianship of the site and a role in engaging with the multiple communities of the Welsh Harp.

P13 Explore the introduction of measures to allow for the temporary shutting off of areas during breeding/nesting season, or to allow regeneration, set out in the form of a spatial strategy. This could form part of the London Borough of Brent or Barnet's contributions to a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for London.

Precedent - The Wandle Valley Regional Park brings together 900 hectares of open space under one regional park identity with a unified vision to enhance its natural capital. It is managed by The Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust providing strategic oversight and leadership of a partnership committed to quality, resilience and management. The Trust has charitable status with a number of key objectives, including conservation of the natural environment, provision of leisure facilities, and improving physical and social access to recreation activities.





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 --> Atlas: p.58--69, p.100-101

The Welsh Harp's identity should be consolidated and celebrated, whilst acknowledging that this valuing is not as widespread as it could be. Work to boost knowledge and awareness is needed as a way of building understanding of the place and enriching its role in the lives of Londoners.

To achieve this, the following is proposed:

P14 Create a unified identity for the site as a whole, the 'Welsh Harp' - this should include renaming discrete landscapes within the area such that they better feel part of the wider place.

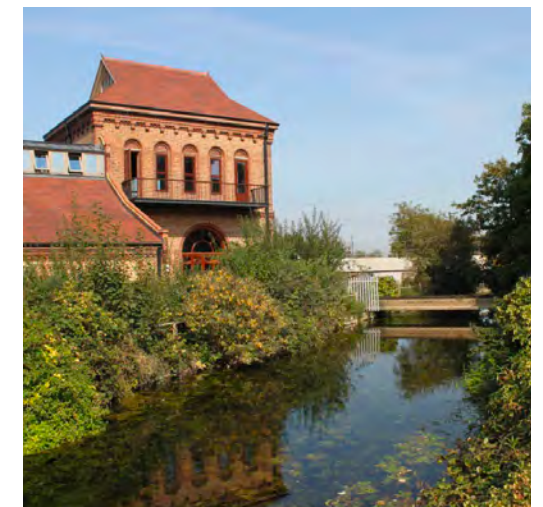
P15 Develop a clearer, more beautiful visual identity for the Welsh Harp as a whole, deployed in documents, in social media and physically on and off site through signage and interpretation, such that the site is visually distinct from boroughs and other organisations' corporate identities. Natural materials and local skills should be used.

P16 Celebrate the multiple clubs and societies that exist or have existed across the site through signage, public art, interpretation and other forms of promotion.

P17 Boost cultural programming and commissioning on the site, including temporary and permanent public art, arts festivals, celebrations and cultural activity. All will be carefully curated to ensure no damage or disruption to the SSSI and habitats.

P18 Adopt key heritage themes for developing the Welsh Harp's sense of identity through heritage narratives, which could include:

- Its history as a place where humans engage with nature, for example its long history as a destination for ornithologists, allotment users.
- Its history as a place of 'pleasure, fresh air and fun' - for example activities like music halls via the Old Welsh Harp public house and pleasure garden.
- Its history as a place of sport, including pioneering organised activities like regattas, swimming galas, water skiing, sailing, horse-racing, canoeing and cycling (including England's first organised bicycle race).
- Its urban and regional context as a place of countryside on the edges of the urban and suburban, Betjeman's 'lost Elysium'.



Precedent - Walthamstow Wetlands converted a series of industrial buildings into visitor spaces, including a visitor centre, exhibition space, cafe and swift tower, which provide a strong reference to the site's working identity

Environment

The Welsh Harp is a unique, precious and delicate environment. Originally a rural location where the Silk Stream met the river Brent on its way toward the Thames, the landscape was substantially altered in 1835 when the Regent's Canal Company dammed the Brent to create a reservoir. The land and waterscapes of the Welsh Harp have evolved ever since and continue to do so.

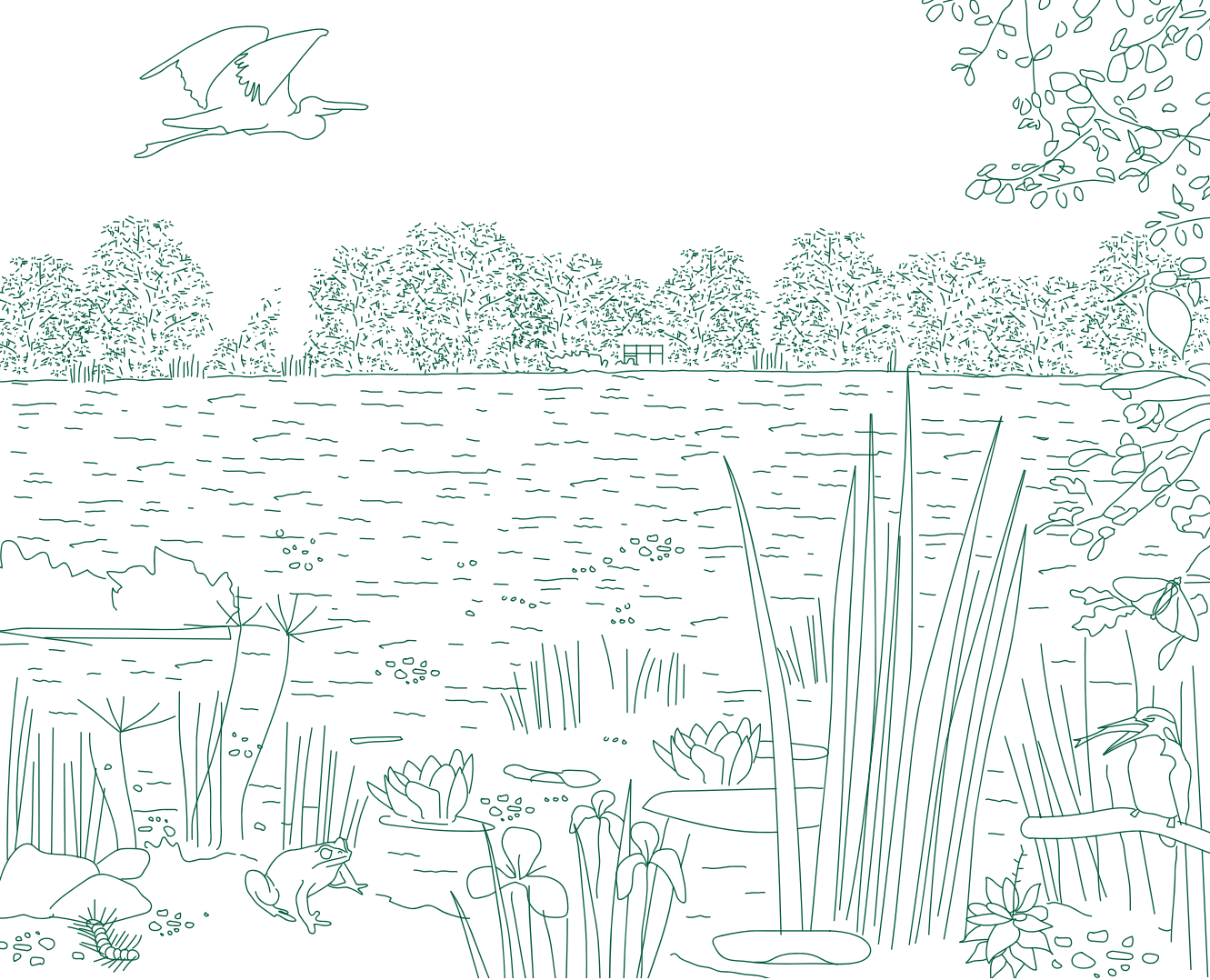
Designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, (SSSI), Local Nature Reserve and Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation, the environment of the Welsh Harp is special in its own right and needs sustained and strategic action to preserve and enhance its environmental quality and ecological value.

The Welsh Harp is not an isolated environment; it is both impacted by, and directly impacts on, the wider landscapes and watercourses of which it is a part. Its role in protecting and enhancing the environmental quality of the wider area is also important, including through boosting climate and flood resilience.

Principles for the future of the environment are subdivided into:

- Biodiversity
- Water
- Climate Resilience





Biodiversity

The site is an important location for regionally important populations of uncommon species of aquatic birds, and its significance as a habitat should be preserved, enhanced and enriched as the 'jewel in the crown' of the whole Welsh Harp --> Atlas: p.84-85. This is particularly, but not exclusively linked to the designation of part of the site as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). --> Atlas: p.92-93.

Supporting and enriching the value to native species and local wildlife, including species of particular relevance to the area (for example, the great crested grebe) builds on the importance

of the site historically as 'one of the most famous localities in the country for rare waterfowl' (Harting & Bond, 1866) and the value it retains to many natural enthusiasts today.

In parallel, the Welsh Harp should be celebrated as a place for its commonplace nature. It is important that room is found for this more everyday nature alongside the notable species for which the site is designated, acknowledging that the food chain relies on such complexity, and that a lifelong love of nature can often be started by the most common encounters.

To achieve this, the following is proposed:

E1 Prioritise recognising and repairing existing habitats, following the understanding of habitats established in the Joint Atlas and building on the intimate knowledge of local campaigners and conservationists. This should include re-establishing the wetlands, coppicing willows, silt removal and other measures. As part of this, existing breeding rafts across the site need replacing, with additional protection required to prevent predation of target species.

E2 Clearly identify the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which is a distinct area contained within the Welsh Harp, through mapping, signage and information.

E3 Create and expand habitats in line with recommendations from local experts and from a detailed ecological assessment to explore desirable and likely habitats to enrich the diversity and complexity of species. This should happen within the Welsh Harp but also through connections to green infrastructure and watercourses beyond the site boundaries, particularly habitats upstream in the Silk Stream and Dollis Brook catchments.

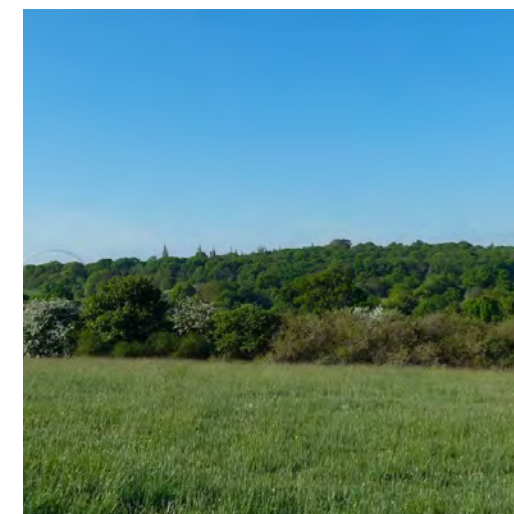
E4 Develop an approach to protect wildlife habitats from humans while preserving appropriate access, including an approach to access that takes into account sensitive times of the year e.g. breeding/nesting season

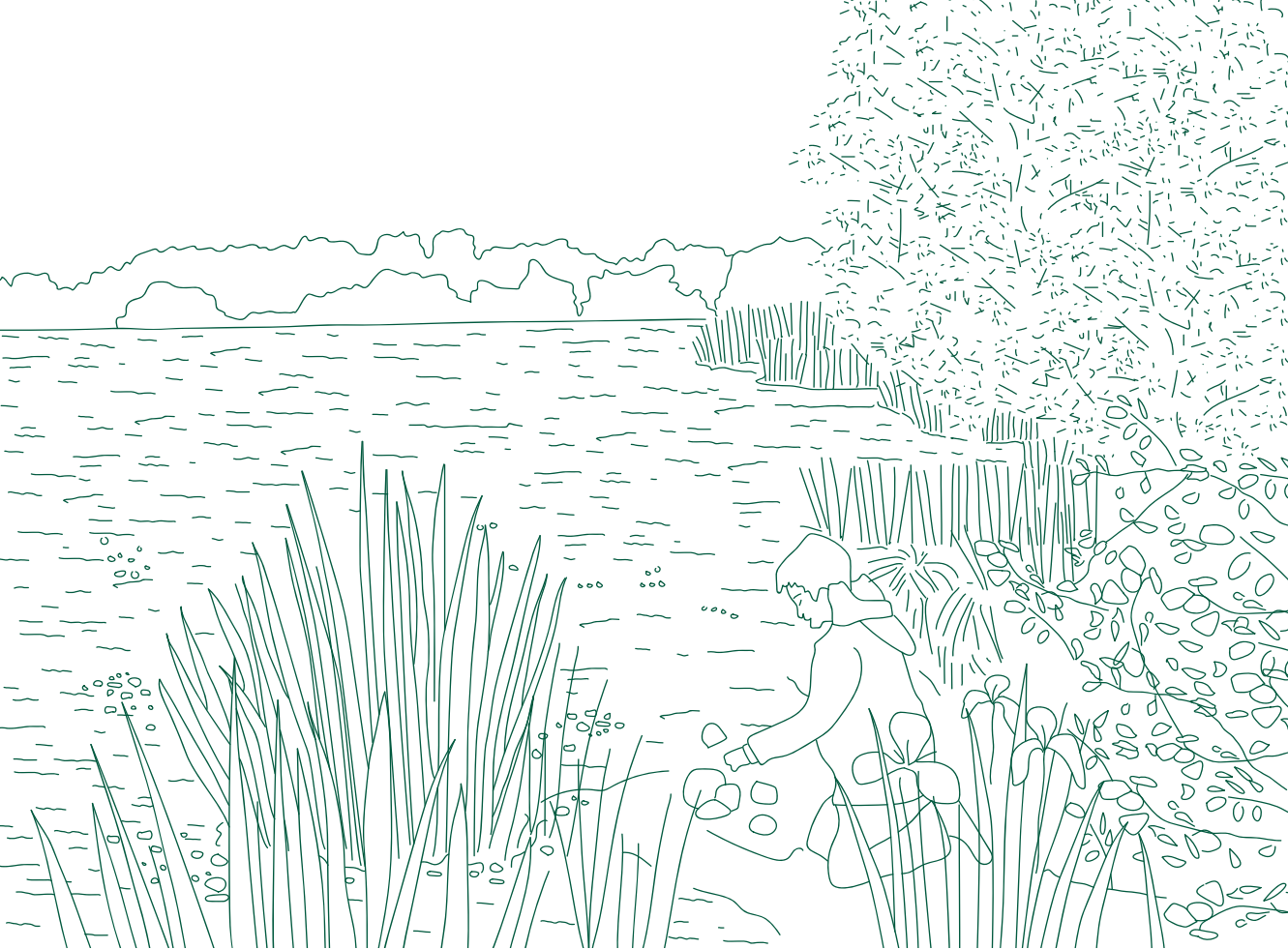
E5 Whilst the protected species and habitats of the SSSI, LNR and SMI should be prioritised, the Welsh Harp is also valuable as a place to experience 'commonplace nature', and this should also be valued in habitat creation and protection.

E6 In the long-term, set ambitious, but attainable, targets for improvements to achieve higher management standards or degrees of conservation protection. This could include consideration of a Green Flag Award for accessibility and management, or potentially Ramsar status in recognition of a significant increase in site's value for aquatic birds.

E7 Recognise that the Welsh Harp sits in the context of significant development and regeneration, and take steps to ensure that development contributes positively to the Vision, helping unlock and enable improvements, and protects the integrity of the SSSI, LNR and SMI.

Precedent - Fryent country Park sits within a significant area of traditional Middlesex countryside, surrounded by suburban development, which is classified as Metropolitan Open Land, protecting the open space from development. Fryent Country Park maintains a clearly legible ancient hedgerow system, farm ponds and hay meadow grasslands, as well as extensive woodland.





Water

The presence of a large freshwater body, lowland open waters and the particular habitats, communities and wildlife that it supports, is a significant contributor to the special character and draw of the Welsh Harp --> Atlas: p.84-85. In association with a string of other such sites across wider London, and in relation to its feeders and tributaries, the Welsh Harp can be understood as part of a complex blue network of ecological and habitat corridors that has historically helped to shape this land and continues to do so in more subtle ways today --> Atlas: p.70-81.

It is vitally important that this water body is monitored, maintained and enhanced to ensure water quality and habitat diversity are strengthened, in recognition of this key asset. Water is valued not

only in environmental terms, but also in cultural terms due to its spiritual and ceremonial associations. Large areas of open water have meditative qualities and could have the capacity to engage many diverse communities surrounding the Welsh Harp.

The understanding of water as a precious natural resource is a critical issue in current environmental education, and new initiatives could help the Welsh Harp be at the forefront of this, offering opportunities to actively participate. Improving the streams flowing in and out could tie the Welsh Harp into a network that could work much harder in terms of environmental and social outputs.

To achieve this, the following is proposed:

E8 Address known existing pollutant issues within the site and entering the site from upstream, and take action to address the issue of contamination entering watercourses downstream from the site - including the Brent feeder and the River Brent as it continues from the Welsh Harp. This could include the introduction of wetlands and reedbeds.

E9 Work with strategic partners to address water quality issues in the local area - for example, proposed water quality improvements to the Brent feeder by Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC) and Thames 21.

E10 Establish an active monitoring system for water quality, recording water quality, contaminants and pollution at different points in the site, but particularly within the SSSI area and the water sports areas. Work with responsible bodies to raise and set aside funds for ongoing monitoring.

E11 Support the expansion of wetland edge habitat creation, to increase potential for filtration and phyto-remediation but also expand the range of habitats on site, from reedbed fringes to wet woodland.

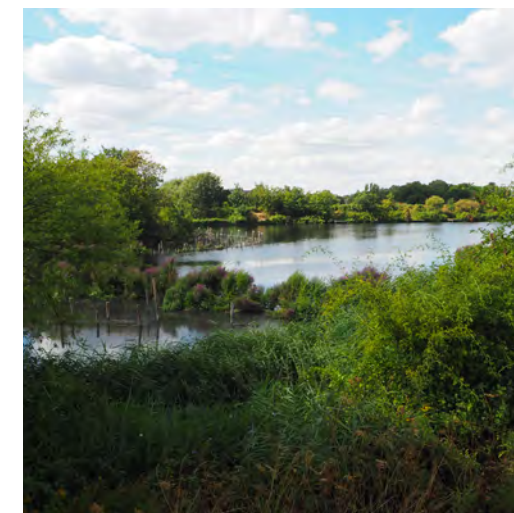
E12 Explore learning opportunities for the appreciation of water as a natural resource, including physical appreciation of the natural water cycle. Partner with existing club facilities such as Phoenix Canoe and Outdoor Centre. Children and young people could be engaged with active monitoring of water quality, or the creation of wetland habitat.

E13 Consider areas of the Welsh Harp that could be given over to seasonal flooding or waterlogging, helping to alleviate exceptional flood risk and surface water drainage issues from surrounding streets, encouraging seasonally wet vegetation types, and

allowing greater natural percolation and evaporation from the landscape.

E14 As part of a holistic interpretation and identity story, provide opportunities on site for visitors to understand the complex hydrology and river networks that have helped to shape this place, including potential for a creative 'waymark' to signal the former channel of the River Brent as a course through the water space.

E15 As part of water quality improvements, consider a plan for introducing a wild swimming area within the Welsh Harp, sensitively integrated and fringed by reedbeds, to provide direct opportunity for engagement with the water whilst avoiding disruption to habitats.



Precedent - Walthamstow Wetlands is a fully operational Thames Water reservoir and industrial heritage site - a designated SSSI and internationally protected Ramsar site, whilst also providing the main source of water supply for 3.5 million people in London. The site is one of the largest urban wetland nature reserves in Europe and is particularly important for wildlife due to its position within the wider Lee Valley, much of which is designated a Metropolitan Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), and as a key ecological connection for migrating, wintering and breeding birds.



Climate Resilience

The Welsh Harp can play a vital role in addressing wider issues faced by its urban context in terms of the changing climate. As a unique urban wild space, with complex networks of both green and blue infrastructure, the Welsh Harp acts as a 'green lung' for the surrounding area, and its wetland habitats play a vital role in sequestering carbon --> Atlas: p.80-81.

There is potential for its influence and benefits to extend beyond its current boundaries, mitigating the urban heat island effect through cooling provided by the transpiration of a significant number of mature trees and multi-layered planting areas. Expanding these naturally complex systems helps to intercept, attenuate and take-up rainwater, and address air

quality issues from major surrounding roads, allowing planting to filter and absorb particulate matter. The Welsh Harp has the potential to play more of an active role in the sustainable use of water from around the site, with possibilities to expand a wider sustainable drainage strategy linking the Welsh Harp to its surrounding streets and green spaces.

To achieve this, the following is

proposed:

E16 Tie environmental objectives for the Welsh Harp into existing strategic objectives for enhancing climate resilience, locally and across London - for example, the London Environment Strategy, the All London Green Grid Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG).

E17 Commission a study to explore and develop the potential for a holistic water strategy for the area surrounding the Welsh Harp, linked to the surrounding streets and green spaces. This could explore opportunities for rainwater interception and take-up, and surface water filtration and attenuation, through a network of sustainable drainage features, including rain gardens and swales. Reference the London Strategic SuDS Pilot to identify locations for rainwater gardens and swales and work with relevant utility companies to consider alignments with any upcoming or ongoing projects.

E18 Link up communities surrounding the Welsh Harp with regional strategies to improve resilience in the environment - for example, street tree planting initiatives along major roadways or industrial parks, or street verge rain gardens to form green corridors, as outlined in the All London Green Grid SPG.

E19 Improve the pedestrian and cycle route along the southern edge of the Welsh Harp/Neasden recreation ground using planted sustainable drainage features to attenuate and filter contaminated surface water run-off from the adjacent North Circular.

E20 Explore potential for the Welsh Harp to act as a recording site for climate data in the local area and in the context of London as a whole, building on existing environmental education initiatives. An air quality recording station could be set up to monitor air quality in the local area and track changes.

E21 Develop the environmental education remit of the Welsh Harp, so that it can be established as a demonstrator site for urban climate resilience methods, showcasing innovations or testing new ideas.



Precedent - Miyawaki/Tiny forest in Witney, West Oxfordshire - a haven for biodiversity, planting 600 native trees in land the size of a tennis court to contribute to habitat gain, urban temperature cooling and rainfall interception in a way that directly engages visitors to site and provides an active example of increasing climate resilience

Wellbeing

The Welsh Harp is valued by many users and communities for the role it plays in supporting wellbeing and healthy lifestyles. Its offer in these terms ranges from the simple pleasure of a large, natural space as an antidote to a busy lifestyle, through to elaborate or complex facilities providing for particular sports and hobbies.

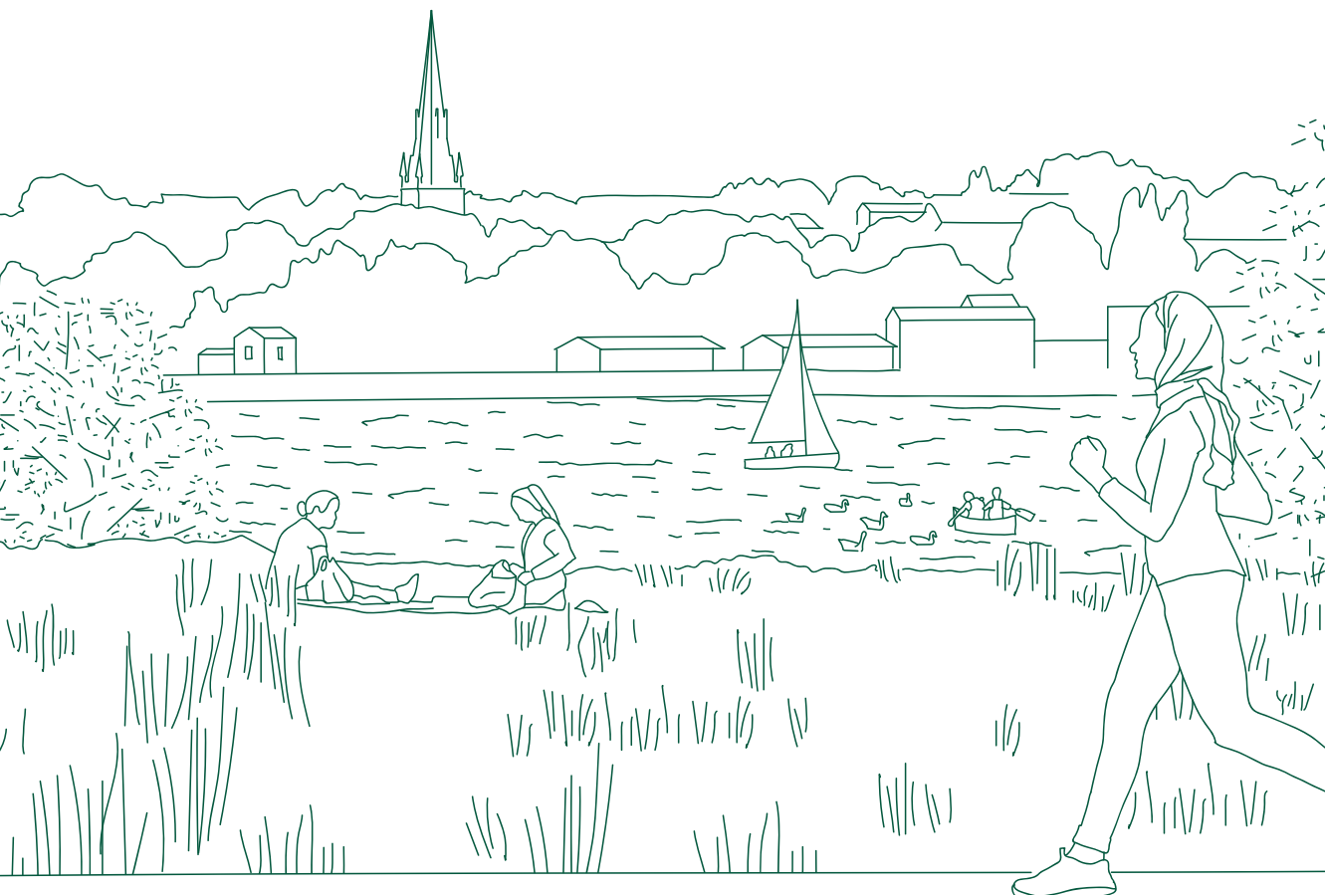
The landscapes of the Welsh Harp are dotted with a wide variety of different clubs and societies that are a strong part of its identity and culture, many of which have a long term presence here. In the past, the reservoir and adjacent spaces provided an even more diverse series of activities and venues, from cycle and greyhound racing to aviation and a music hall.

The needs of sport and recreation can sometimes conflict with the preservation of wildlife habitats but the Welsh Harp has, in general, seen this balance managed well in recent years, and this mixing of uses and characters is fundamental to its significance. Balancing the needs of all users, human and wildlife, and strengthening engagement opportunities between them, will be important as uses change and habitats expand and improve.

Principles for promoting wellbeing are subdivided into:

- Health & Wellbeing
- Sport & Recreation
- Connection to Nature





Health & Wellbeing

The Welsh Harp plays a strong role in the health and wellbeing of local people.

A uniquely large and complex landscape in this part of London, it provides, on an informal basis, access to space, quietude, peace and nature, all of which can have profound positive health impacts, both in physical and mental terms. It also offers particular amenities and conditions which support and promote healthy lifestyles and wellbeing and which are a complement to sporting facilities, for example allotment spaces and opportunities for hedgerow fruit picking --> Atlas: p.110-111. The importance of this offer has been strongly underlined by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Much of the Welsh Harp's offer in health and wellbeing terms is part and parcel with its environmental qualities. Nonetheless a deliberate strategy to support its health and wellbeing offer, particularly through reaching out to communities who do not currently benefit from it, is required. The Welsh Harp should be a primary source of health and wellbeing for the many communities around it, a place to be alone and to come together.

To achieve this, the following is proposed:

W1 Support and boost activities and events that are multi-generational and inter-sectional - bringing diverse parts of the community together.

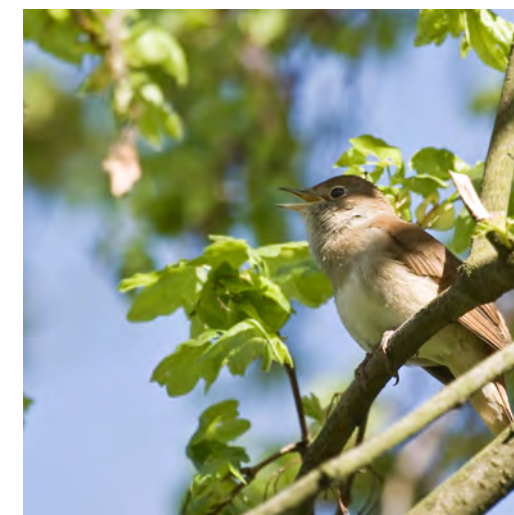
W2 Support and boost activities and events that bring the unique qualities of the Welsh Harp to new audiences and using new experiences, for example night walks and nature experiences. Additional work to promote this programming to under-represented groups is likely to be required, using the social infrastructure mapping included in the Atlas.

W3 Understand responsible seasonal foraging outside of the SSSI, and provide planting to support these activities, including berrying shrubs, fruit and nut trees, edible herbs and flowers. Exploring opportunities within the Welsh Harp for the promotion of wild food gathering, connected to adjacent allotment uses, and part of a promotion in local food production, could provide an engaging and lively way for healthy and thrifty 'food for free'.

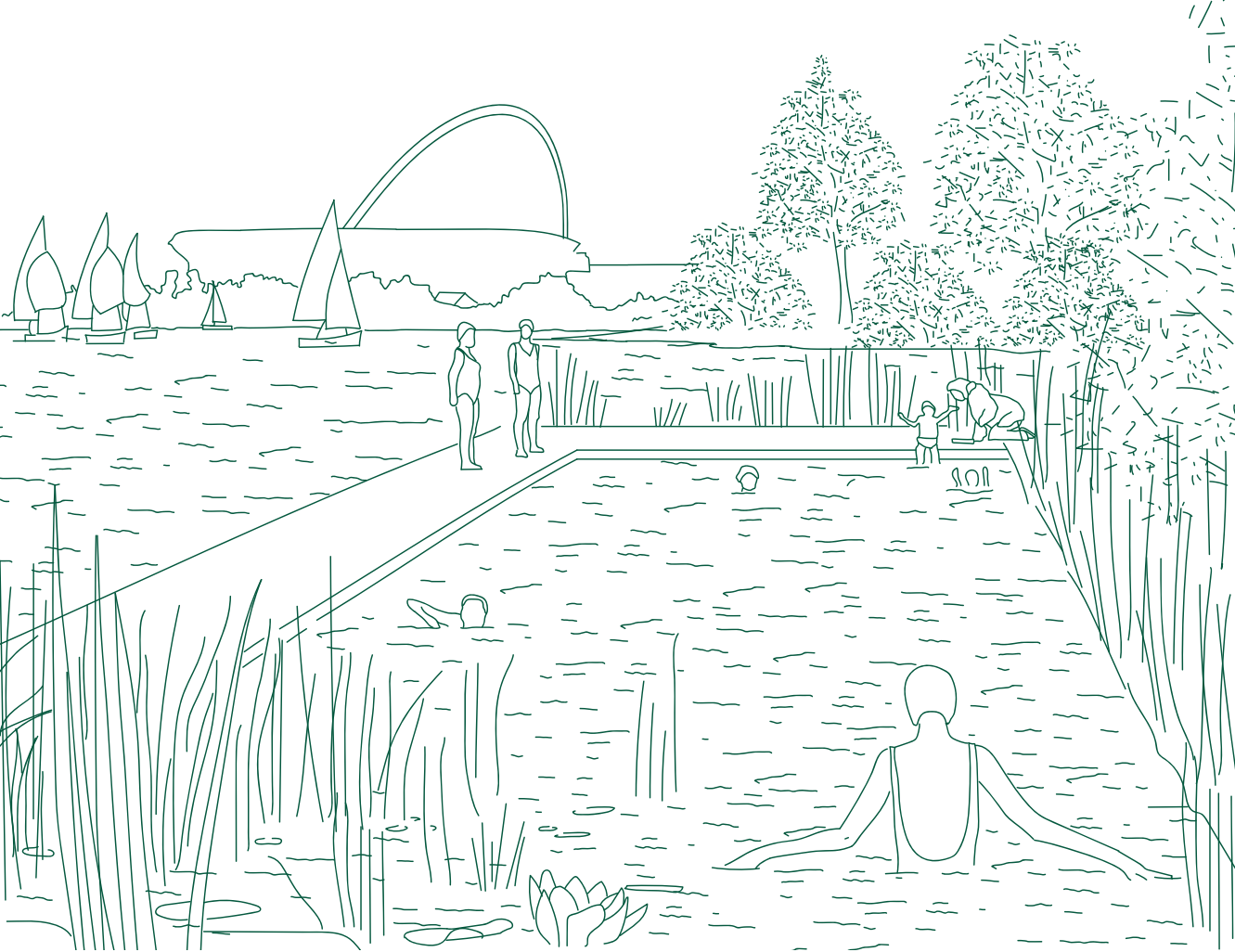
W4 Support areas of the site that are used as allotments and productive landscapes and involve these user groups in the management of the site - could produce be sold locally or on site?

W5 Explore opportunities around 'green skills' training - working in partnership with local healthcare services, businesses and community groups to expand the potential for the Welsh Harp to play a part in facilitating training in green skills. This could include establishing the Welsh Harp as a demonstrator site for landscape management skills, or the provision of apprenticeships for local people.

W6 Facilitate the establishment of the Welsh Harp as an ideal site for Nature Prescribing Programmes, Green Social Prescribing programmes, feeding into both local and London-wide services, such as Walking for Health.



Precedent - The Nest Collective curates silent journeys into Nightingale habitats in carefully selected UK landscapes in Gloucestershire and Sussex, culminating in a 'hybrid' concert combining Nightingale song with human performers, notably the folk musician Sam Lee.
Source: Image licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 license



Sport & Recreation

The Welsh Harp is deeply valued as a place for sports and recreation.

It has a history of providing both informal places (for example throwing a frisbee, walking in or playing make-believe) and formal places (for example sports clubs, races and dedicated venues and water) for play, sport and recreation, and this range and variety should be maintained and expanded
 --> Atlas: p.110-111.

In this context an appropriate balance is needed that allows for the fullest range of sport and recreation activities whilst preserving space for nature, ensuring that only appropriate activities take place, and that uses do not clash or cause damage. This will involve some demarcation of space and also some sharing.

To achieve this, the following is proposed:

W7 Understand the appropriate play, sports and recreation uses and then find space for them according to a clear management plan that responds to local need, long-standing rights and accesses and how safe usage of the facilities can be encouraged and maintained, including through collaboration with on-site organisations and groups.

W8 Where appropriate, integrate uses that are currently problematic - for example fishing - into the site, allocating appropriate space. In most cases finding space and setting clear rules, rather than legislating against, should be the preferred option.

W9 Establish a clear spatial strategy to ensure the water body continues to serve as a space for sport, recreation and education without disruption to habitats. The south-western end of the 'harp' remains most suited to on-water sport and recreation.

W10 Design new paths and loops across the site to (alongside other priorities) promote long-distance sports activity such as running through organised running routes. Refer to routes promoted in the All London Green Grid and use available data such as Strava to assist with making routes.

W11 Explore the provision of durable outdoor gym and play equipment in appropriate locations, locating new equipment so that it complements existing provision.

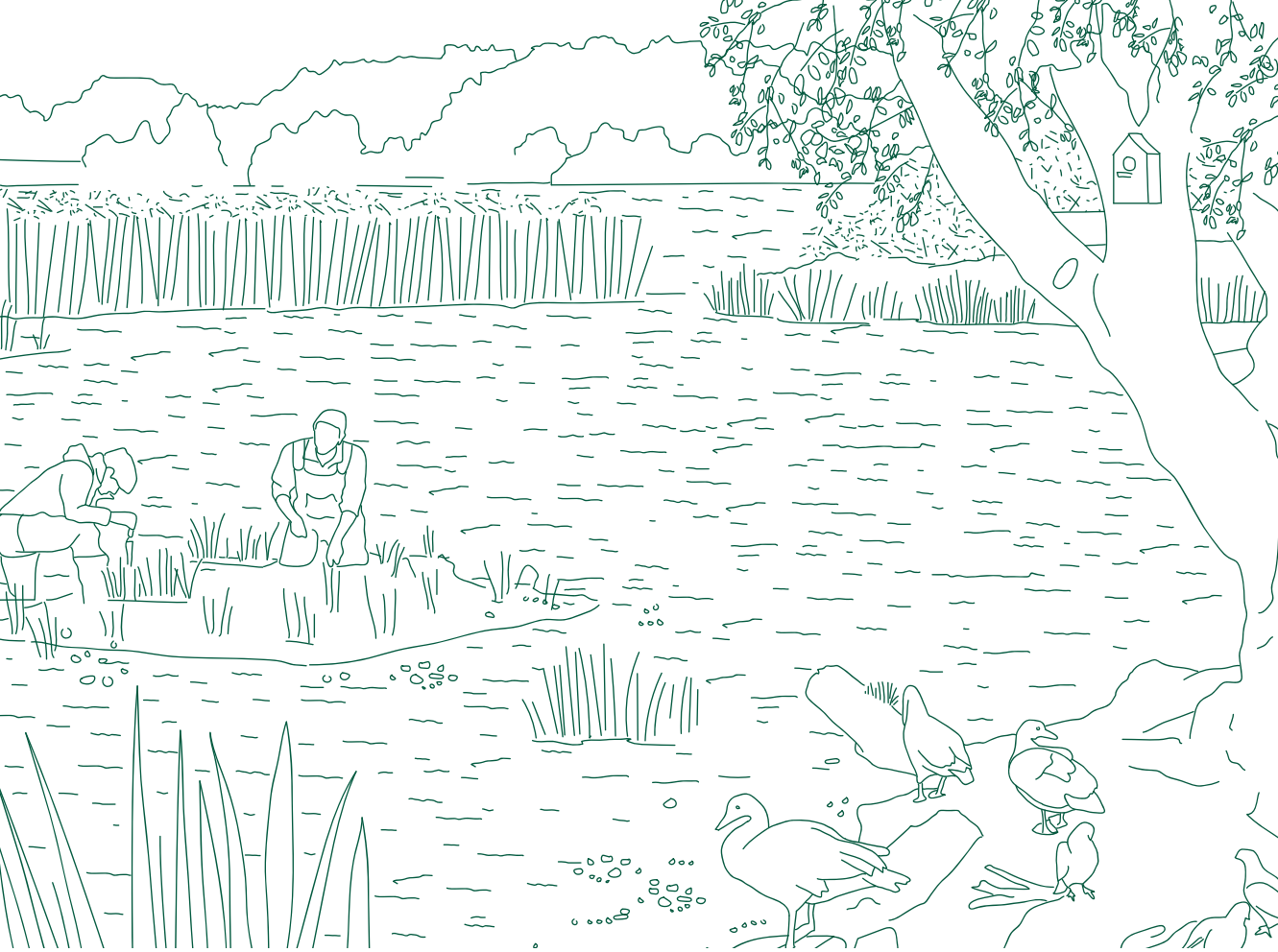
W12 Develop a play strategy, incorporating purpose-designed elements but also natural play, trails, and explore how other pieces of landscaping or street furniture can have play value.

W13 Work to understand whether environmental improvements could make the Welsh Harp a safe water body for wild and outdoor swimming. Work to ensure that swimming does not disturb or damage sensitive habitats, and is clearly directed away from the SSSI

W14 Work with local groups, clubs and societies, as well as national bodies, to explore an expansion of on-water activity such as swimming, personal kayak use, stand-up paddle boarding and rowing.

Precedent - Sale Water Park is an area of countryside and parkland including an artificial lake, located in an area of the green belt that runs through the Mersey valley. The lake was formed in the 1970s by the flooding of a former gravel pit. Broad Ees Dole, in the northeast of Sale Water Park, is an important wildlife refuge designated as a Local Nature Reserve due to its importance to migratory birds and the diversity of its plant life including an orchid meadow. In tandem, Trafford Water Sports Centre is situated on the edge of the lake offering water sports and angling is designated areas, plus community events such as weekly park runs.





Connection to Nature

In developing a vision for the Welsh Harp, the wellbeing of all species must be considered, requiring an approach of inclusivity, adaptability and care. In the current context of the climate and biodiversity crises, we must consider the applicability of our spaces to species other than our own, and ensure that we are designing with the health and wellbeing of a wide range of plants and animals in mind. This is supported by the site's designation as a biological Site of Special Scientific Interest, Local Nature Reserve and a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation; a place with importance for both people and wildlife--> Atlas: p.92-93.

The Welsh Harp occupies a special situation in being a wild space sat within two outer city boroughs - a chance for people to experience 'wild nature' first hand and develop an enhanced emotive connection with the natural world. Developing the rich habitats and communities already found on site --> Atlas: p.84-85, with a renewed focus on acknowledging soil types, emulating natural complexity and extending the range and habitat of locally relevant species, we can ensure the Welsh Harp continues to thrive as a place where humans and wildlife co-exist to each other's mutual benefit.

To achieve this, the following is proposed:

W15 Emulate natural complexity in planting schemes - work with the soil types and design in layers (soil, underground, ground cover, shrubs and trees) to create multi-layered planting communities that will be suited to their environment, support a wide range of wildlife, and provide joy and inspiration for human visitors.

W16 Establish a management regime, using low-impact tools and techniques, that enhances biodiversity value and maximise potential for interaction - for example, wildflower meadows suited to specific soil conditions, managed once or twice a year by a scything demonstration.

W17 Engage the local communities surrounding the site in habitat creation activities, sourcing materials for and making habitat features such as bug hotels and bird boxes.

W18 Establish environmental controls over artificial lighting that balance the needs of users - only providing light where there is a safety or navigational issue, and avoiding artificial light that affects night-time foraging corridors.

W19 Establish a programme of events that connects people with their environment in direct ways, wild food walks, foraging sessions, bird watching or night-time bat walks are an enjoyable and interactive family activities.

W20 Connect the Welsh Harp to the network of surrounding streets and private gardens with the creation of green links and removal of barriers for small mammals, such as 'hedgehog highways' in gaps within fence lines --> Atlas: Ecology p.82

W21 Consider provision of dedicated areas for the public to engage with wildlife, with appropriate signage and measures in place to prevent undue damage or erosion - for example, duck feeding areas, with natural duck food for sale.

Note: some of the above principles relate strongly to the →Ecology principles E1-E6 and should be read in conjunction with this.

Precedent - Designed to exceed Biodiversity Net Gain targets, the development at Kidbrooke village and neighbouring Cator Park contains attenuation ponds and wetland habitat, wildflower meadows and woodland, swift bricks and bee hotels, and a large new adventure play area, enhancing connection to nature in an urban environment



Inclusion

The Welsh Harp is valued by a large and diverse range of people, though it is not as known and inclusive as it could be. It should be accessible to all whilst preserving its special atmosphere and qualities. It should be easy to reach, especially on foot and on bicycle, well-connected to neighbouring communities, landscapes and places, yet remain 'special' and distinct.

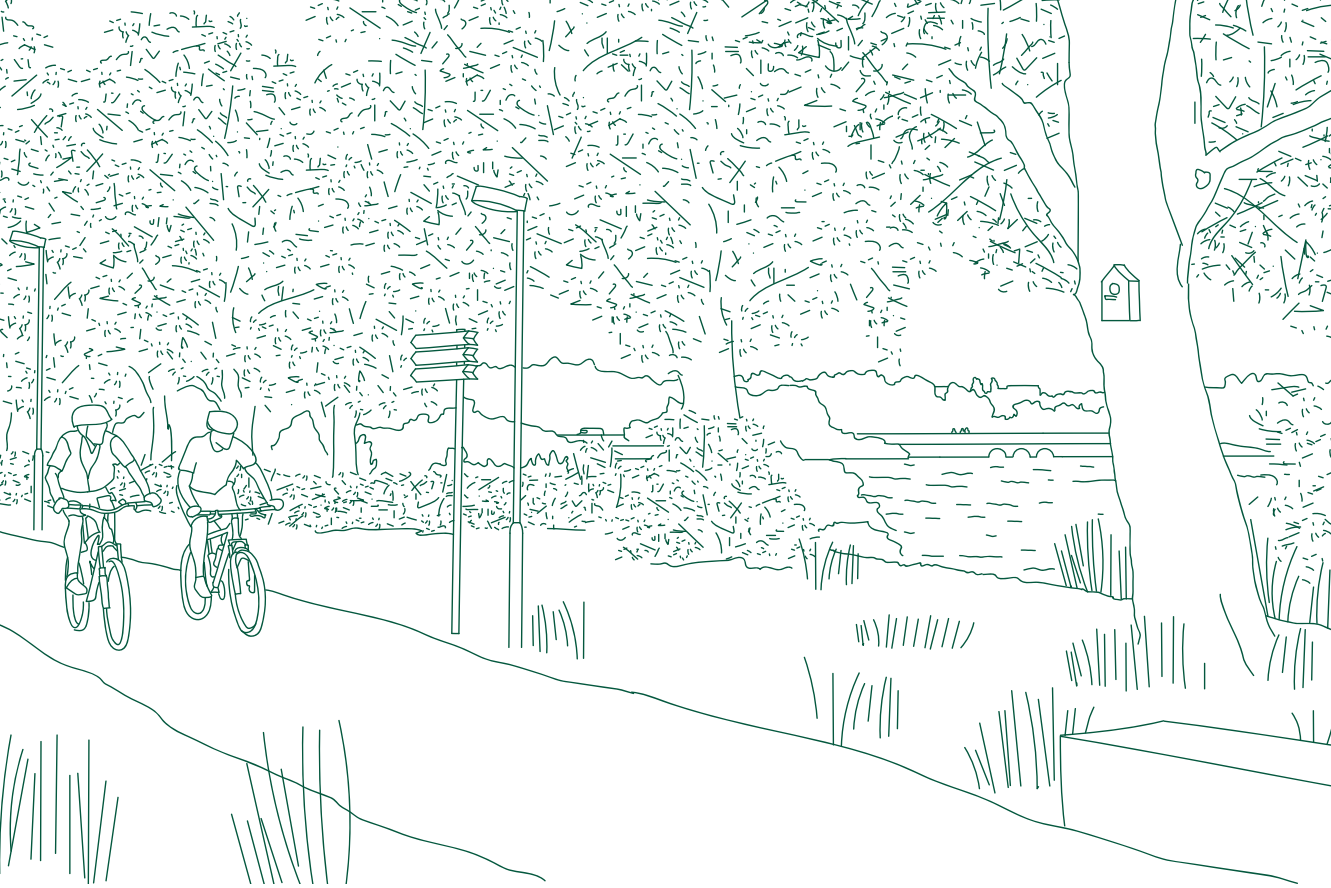
Inclusion and access are not just about physical accessibility but also emotive connections, interpretive access (for example knowing about the site and its meaning), exploration & discovery, plus perceptions of how welcoming the Welsh Harp is for diverse communities and different demographics. See also --> Vision: Health & Wellbeing

Being able to access the Welsh Harp also depends on it providing the right amenities and provisions to make everyone feel comfortable, safe and supported when using the place.

Principles for an inclusive Welsh Harp are subdivided into:

- Access & Movement
- Knowledge
- A centre





Access & Movement

Improving access is about the entrance-points and fringes of the site and how they integrate and announce the Welsh Harp to the wider city but also about how the site is navigated, moved through, and physically & sensorially interacted with. Multiple access issues across the site, such as waterlogged or inaccessible paths, should be dealt with as part of a holistic access strategy --> Atlas: p.102-107.

Access strategies should understand the whole site as a publicly accessible green space in the city or 'unofficial countryside', land in which everyone has a stake, including both humans and wildlife. Where appropriate, influence of the Welsh Harp should expand outward into surrounding landscapes and communities, and this should be considered in tandem with enhancing entrances.

To achieve this, the following is proposed:

i1 Ensure that the multiple entrances are clearly defined, welcoming, and safe, and play a part in providing a clear single identity to the Welsh Harp. There is a hierarchy of entrances across the site boundary; some are distinctive and formal entrances used by visitors and needing a higher degree of interpretation and welcome, others are more informal and used by locals to access the site as part of the everyday urban context. Design improvements should acknowledge this hierarchy.

i2 Explore the potential for additional entrances or the formalisation of existing informal ones. Where informal access already exists and is considered to be in an appropriate location it should, in general, be formalised to ensure it is accessible for all.

i3 Work with Transport for London to explore using the name 'Welsh Harp' in bus stop naming.

i4 Develop a strategic approach to creating new paths and access points based upon an 'inner loop' following the waterline as much as possible and a series of enhanced connections on the periphery of the site, delivered in a way that also promotes use for sports activity such as distance-specific running events.

i5 Develop a package of designs for enhancing existing paths and creating new ones, aimed at minimising environmental impact whilst preserving good access throughout the year for people of all abilities.

i6 Users of different abilities and needs must be taken into account and designs for access tailored to ensure that nobody is left out of experiencing the Welsh Harp. This should not only include providing physical access - such as for those with mobility issues - but also providing experiences tailored to specific users, for example sensory experiences.

i7 Explore opportunities to provide safe and accessible crossings over the North Circular Road and other significant transport routes locally.

i9 Work strategically, creating connections to nearby open space, walking routes and destinations, including the Capital Ring and the new waterside walking route following the River Brent toward Chalkhill and Wembley.

i10 Provide seating to provide places for people to rest, dwell and gain shelter, encouraging active travel for the less mobile.

i11 Develop access across the site based upon appropriateness of access and means of travel relative to habitat and extant species, for example clear appropriate routes and spaces for cycling, designing buffers between paths and key habitats to mitigate against potential conflicts, as well as consideration of night time access and its impact on wildlife. This should include a clear strategy for enhancing Cool Oak Lane as a very particular highway through the site.

i12 Explore opportunities to expand the daily usage of, and access to, the site after dark through both design and specific programming, for example night walks, evening cultural activities.

Precedent - Westergasfabriek culture park, Netherlands is a model of brownfield reclamation, this 11.5 hectare park acts as a cultural venue, hosting a programme of activities year round. Habitat and wetland creation is included in this dense urban environment, with parts of the park allowed to flood during exceptional events.





i13 Ensure that environmental education and knowledge-building are key themes across the site - bringing people and nature into closer contact. This should involve collaboration with local experts, groups and schools.

i14 Deliver better, regularly updated on-site interpretation and signage, including notices, public information campaigns, information on historical and natural history, current events, including at site edges and in the wider area.

i15 Create a single account across social media platforms to ensure coherent, consistent public messaging

i16 Deliver 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

i17 Support, maintain and expand the activities of the Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre with a view to it thriving and becoming economically independent. This should include supporting and expanding its collaborations with local institutions, clubs and schools. The Centre should ideally bring all children in local schools into contact with nature through its programming.

i18 Foster and build 'green' skills through educational activities and programmes at the Welsh Harp, aligned with an ongoing management plan. Programmes should aim to create jobs, apprenticeships and skills training in the wider area, aligned to the specific needs of the Welsh Harp as one of London's most significant urban wild places.

Knowledge

There should also be greater public knowledge of the Welsh Harp and its existing qualities and amenities, 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 and water supply. Building this knowledge across the local area, city and region will contribute to the inclusivity of the Welsh Harp as a place.

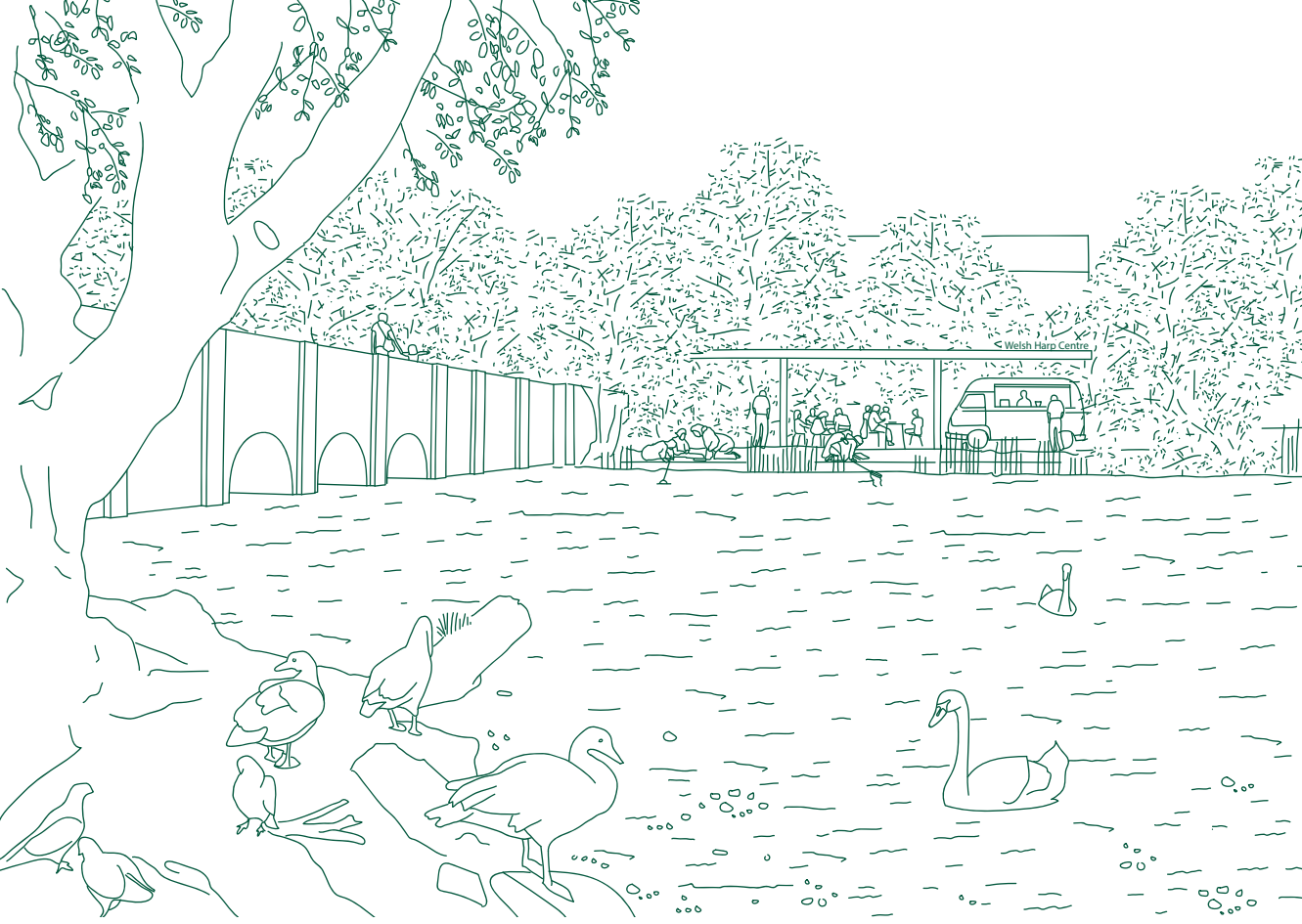
The Welsh Harp is already strongly valued by some as a place to explore nature and the environment, and it has never been more urgent that the population at large is educated about, and engaged in, issues of nature, wildlife, climate, biodiversity and the environment.

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.

To achieve this, the following is proposed:



Precedent - Camley Street Natural Park



A centre

The Welsh Harp contains club houses, social facilities, an education centre, schools, allotment spaces and other spaces and venues, --> Atlas: p.110-111, but not a single public 'centre' or venue containing diverse facilities, to act as a source of information, a place to dwell and access goods and services, an information hub and provider of facilities and amenity. The provision of such an amenity, engagement suggests, would strongly boost and widen the range of visitors who would want to, and feel able to, access and use the Welsh Harp. For example a convenient and accessible toilet facility would unlock the site for many users.

There are various options for how a 'centre' might be understood and developed, and the right solution is not necessarily a single, permanent structure.

New facilities should support a framework for future flexibility to allow the spaces to be adapted and evolve over time, and take on new uses and users. Temporary provision of facilities might work as part of this.

To achieve this, the following is proposed:

i19 Market-test uses and sites through meanwhile prototypes, in advance of more substantial investment. For example a pre-existing takeaway van or coffee stall could be sited in a particular location at the Welsh Harp to explore local need and desire, bearing in mind that such businesses can take weeks or months for effective 'word of mouth' to take place. Environmental impact of any meanwhile use should be a critical factor in identifying uses and sites. Evaluation should take place in due course to ensure that lessons are learnt in advance of significant investment in permanent facilities.

i20 Work collectively to refine a clear brief of required and desired facilities and amenities for such a building or centre.

i21 Commission feasibility work to explore the various options tabled during the engagement process and establish the most desirable and appropriate development route. Options include an expansion of existing facilities, a new building at the heart or edge(s) of the site, or mobile provision. Environmental impact should be a critical factor in identifying sites and developing designs, with any brownfield or otherwise damaged sites prioritised in any evaluation.

i22 Establish a clear responsibility for overseeing and management of any such facility, linked into the wider site management strategy and/or the formation of a Trust.



Precedent - Rainham Marshes is maintained by RSPB with local partners including LB Havering. Rainham marshes SSSI is formed of 411 hectares of ancient low-lying grazing marsh in the Thames Estuary, across the London / Essex boundary. The site is formed of complex rich habitats including grassland, reedbeds, scrub and woodland supporting a wide variety of breeding and overwintering birds. Managed by the RSPB, it has a central education centre, offering recreational visitor facilities including a cafe, shop, bike hire, photography hide, and a programme of talks with links to local schools. A holistic network of accessibility improvements were delivered in 2011 including a 'walking bridge' link to the Rainham train station and local centre.



Scenarios

A series of high-level design scenarios have been developed, intended to provide examples of how the detailed principles might develop into tangible projects and strategies. This is by no means exhaustive and in each case present only one possible approach to the principle(s) being explored.

In each case the principles informing each scenario have been set out.

From this, a series of tangible next steps have been developed which are presented in the following section.

SCENARIOS

- Improve tributaries and feeders
- Create a centre
- Enhance entrances and boundaries
- Create a coherent network of paths

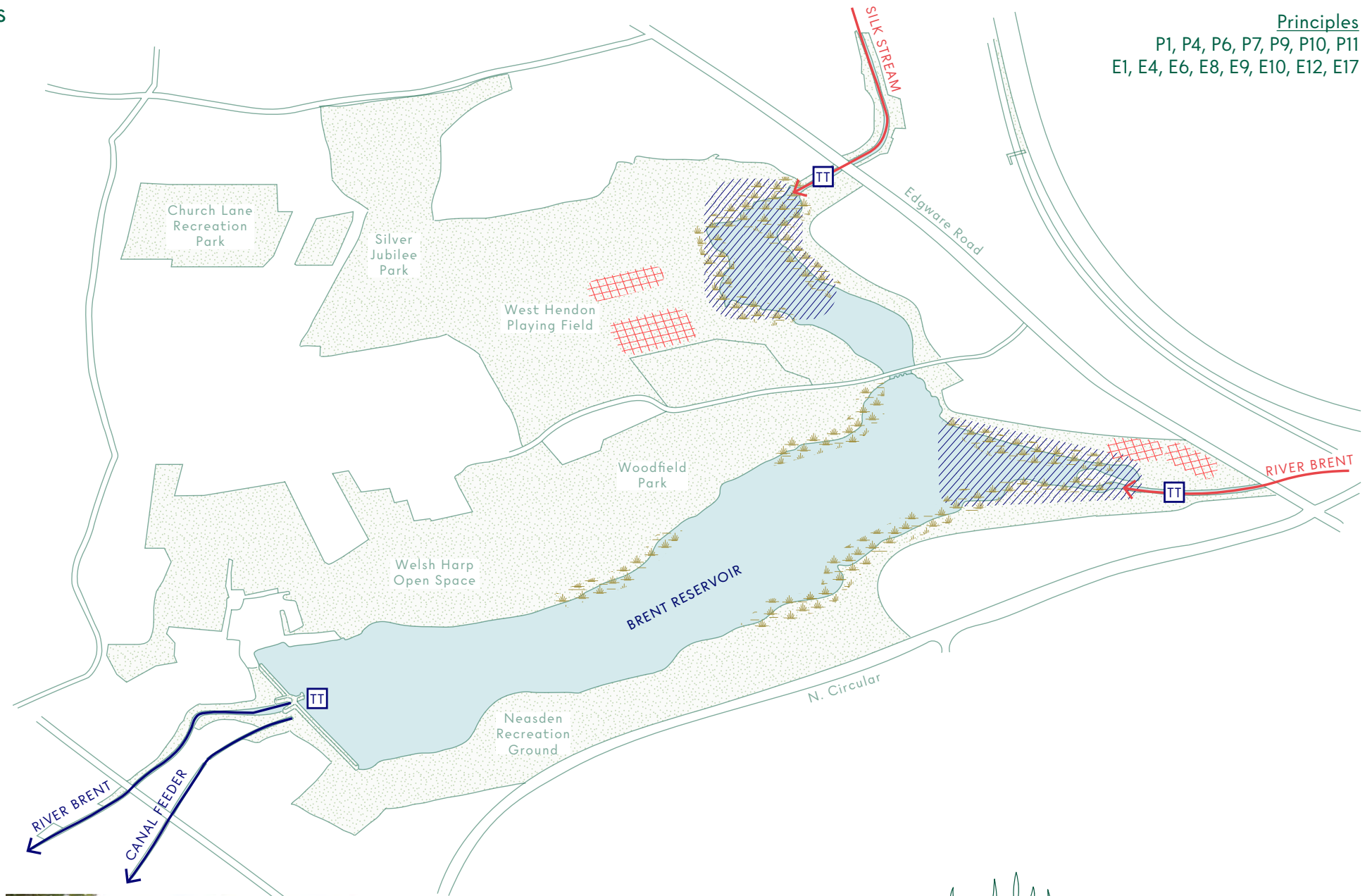
Improve tributaries and feeders

Debris and pollutants entering the Welsh Harp waters from its inlets - the Brent and the Silk Stream - are a crucial environmental issue and are already the focus of attention.

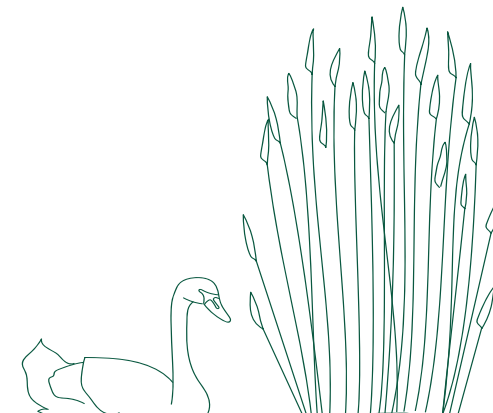
This scenario imagines not only technical and maintenance solutions located at each inlet but a placemaking approach which sees access and movement improvements happening in parallel, proposing that enhanced visibility of, and access to, the 'spaces' of the two feeders should be part and parcel of their enhancement.

The scenario imagines that access to the Welsh Harp landscapes is provided alongside the Brent and the Silk Stream, well integrated with neighbouring communities and designed such that disruption to habitats is minimised. In both locations, a non-disruptive way of allowing people to cross the waterways is created, and remediation and reconstruction of habitats in adjacent parts of the reservoir - East Marsh and North Marsh - take place in parallel with the wider works, heavily involving local conservation groups and the wider community and taking the chance to provide educational activities and programming.

The scenario also imagines how the Harp's outlets could have stronger public presence and access.



Principles
P1, P4, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11
E1, E4, E6, E8, E9, E10, E12, E17



- Inlets
- Outlets
- /// Priority Areas
- ▨ Bunds and Tips
- 🌿 Reedbeds
- TT Trash Traps

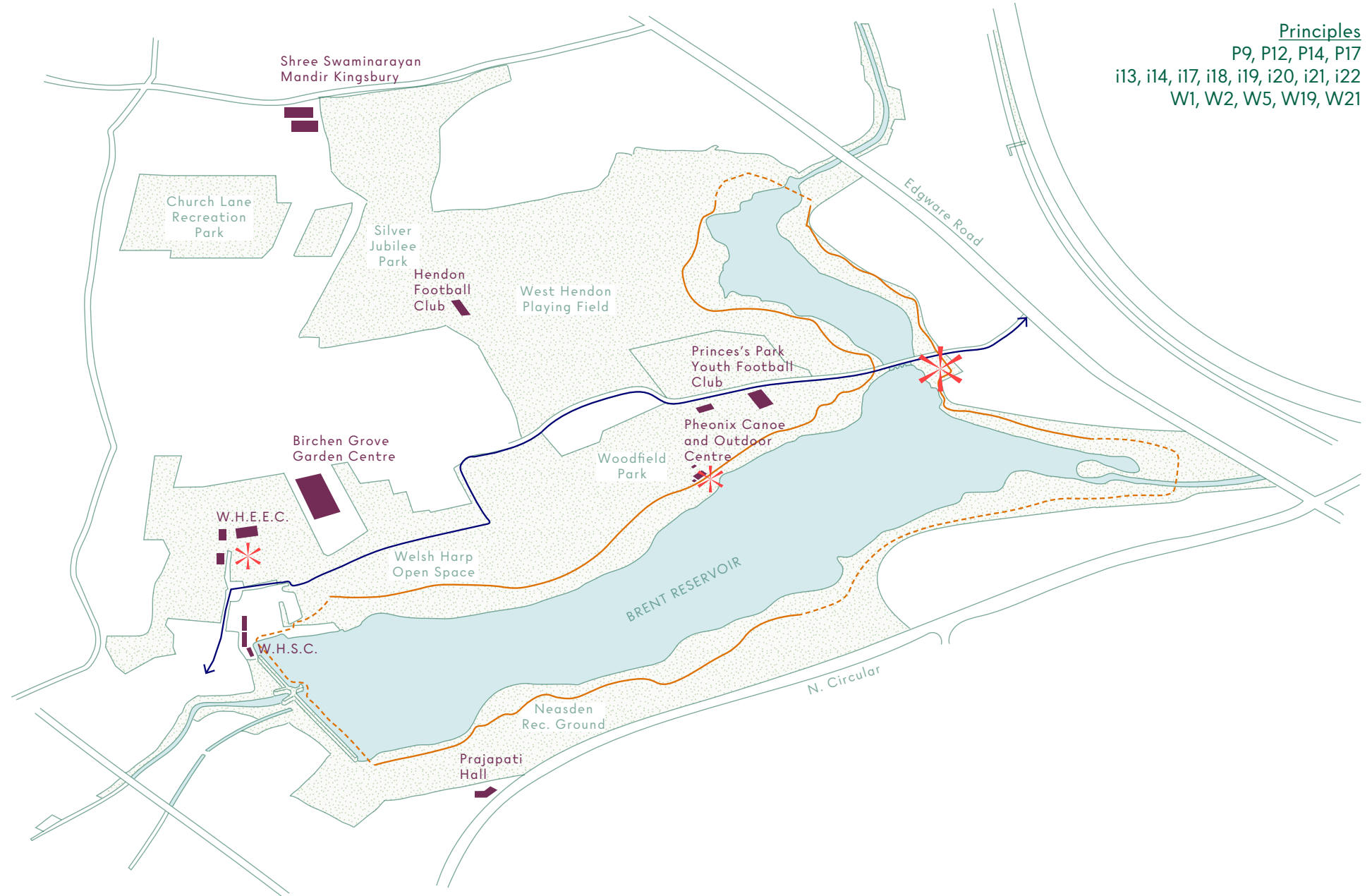
Theatre Evolutif, Bordeaux, Ooze, 2011

Create a centre

This scenario uses existing conditions, recent work and site observations, as well as discoveries from public engagement, to propose a possible site for a centre.

Rather than a capital-intensive new building, the scenario imagines a temporary or meanwhile 'prototyping' of a new centre, a pilot phase which utilises (durable) pop-up design strategies and independent mobile operators (such as street food vendors, coffee stalls, mobile toilets, etc.) to explore what amenities might be useful and desirable. The centre is located at a site which currently serves as a site compound for the West Hendon development, a brownfield site immediately adjacent to Cool Oak Lane and situated directly on key vehicular and pedestrian routes. These mobile uses could also be tested non-invasively on other locations across the Welsh Harp landscapes. It would be crucial for an evaluation to be taking place as to the success of different uses in different locations.

Following this pilot phase a brief for a more permanent centre, learning from this initial phase, could be developed.



Principles
P9, P12, P14, P17
i13, i14, i17, i18, i19, i20, i21, i22
W1, W2, W5, W19, W21



Marshland Discovery Zone, Rainham.Landroom



Erith Lighthouse, Bexley. DK-CM



Gunpowder Visitors Centre, Waltham Forest

-  Proposed Meanwhile Centre
-  Alternative Meanwhile Centres
-  Existing Facilities
-  Existing Inner Loop
-  Proposed Inner Loop
-  Cool Oak Lane Route

Enhance entrances and boundaries

This scenario envisages a series of new and improved entrances across the site, structured to range from informal to formal. More formal entrances require clear, welcoming signage, interpretation and in some cases particular facilities and amenities, such as the centre envisaged in the previous scenario. Less formal entrances, such as those that stitch the Welsh Harp into neighbouring housing areas, require a lighter touch approach focussed on communicating that one is entering the Welsh Harp as a place and enhancing perceptions of safety and sight lines.

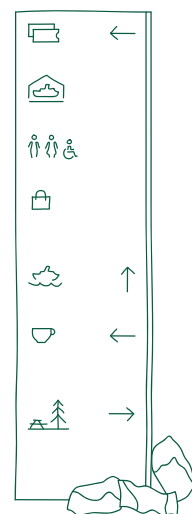
Key new entrances should be located in places which make sense in terms of the wider region and landscape, such as alongside inlets and outlets.

Some enhanced entrances should be accompanied by measures to reduce the impact of greater access, and act as buffers to intrusive adjacent conditions such as the North Circular.

It is also envisaged that many boundary conditions throughout the site could be re-thought in a more welcoming manner, providing more engaging and appropriate boundaries. This could include providing edible hedgerows to expand foraging links across the site.

Elements that might be included or considered as part of enhanced entrances:

- Wayfinding and orientation information, integrated with or closely responding to the Legible London wayfinding system
- Signage or design elements that clearly signal, in a scale and manner appropriate to context, that one is entering an environment/landscape known as the Welsh Harp
- Key amenities and locations clearly signposted, with distances and walking times, including areas of the city 'beyond' the Welsh Harp, e.g. distance to West Hendon from Neasden.
- Durable, weatherproof noticeboards containing clear, regularly updated visitor information, updates, safety advice and points of contact, including messaging from the many organisations that care for, and belong in, the Welsh Harp.
- Potential to 'dress' entrances to signal or communicate special events.



Leyton Presence, East Architecture



Walthamstow Wetlands, Polimekanos/Kinnear Landscape Architects



Gunpowder Park, Waltham Forest

Create a coherent network of paths

Principles
W12, W18, W20
i4, i7, i9, i10, i11, i12

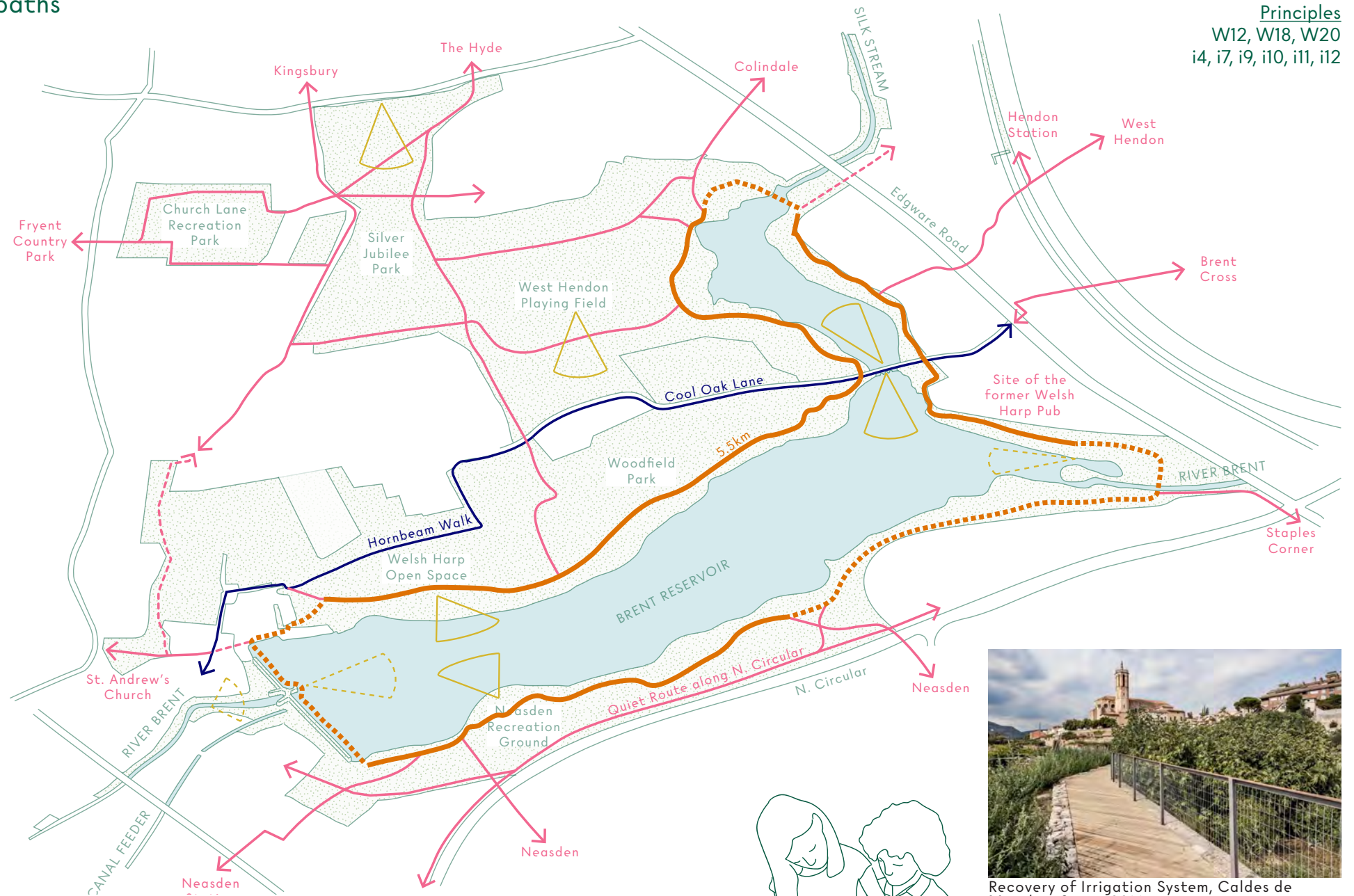
Consolidating and expanding the network of paths across the Welsh Harp should be undertaken in a strategic manner, relative to existing and desired uses and access points. In this scenario the path network is consolidated into an Inner Loop and a series of outer stitches, which are moments of improved or clarified connectivity.

Inner Loop

The ambition here is to provide a single, coherent and highly-visible loop, as much as possible following the waterline of the reservoir. New connections across the water would be necessary in this scenario - carefully designed and located crossings of the Silk Stream and river Brent - as well as a new approach to access at the 'dam' end of the reservoir - in this case a carefully managed pedestrian route running along the top edge of the dam. A single coherent loop such as this would do a great deal to boost the cohesiveness of the whole landscape whilst also enabling 'round the Welsh Harp' sporting activities.

Stitches

These are various key points of connection with the wider area, utilising existing connections but also in places creating new connections such as along the Silk Stream and River Brent. In this scenario various landscapes and spaces bordering the Welsh Harp are reconceived of as 'soft edges' to the site, and many of these have strong meaning in terms of identity and heritage, for example at St Andrews Old Church and the site of the former Welsh Harp pub at the River Brent.



Recovery of Irrigation System, Caldes de Montbui, Spain, 2014.



Aveley Marsh, Landroom, 2009. Boardwalk over wetland or , reedbed screening to minimise disturbance to natural habitats.



Joyce Square, Community Rainpark, Robert Bray Associates, 2017. Swales to convey and filter run-off, with secondary play paths



- ▭ Existing Inner Loop
- ▭ Proposed Inner Loop
- ▭ Cool Oak Lane Route
- ▭ Existing Stitches
- ▭ Proposed Stitches
- ◊ Existing Views
- ◊ Proposed Views

Next Steps

The Welsh Harp Strategy Group is committed to taking forward the ambition and principles contained within this Vision. In support of this we have initiated a continually-evolving Action Plan that will help to deliver the Vision in the years ahead.

Updates on the project and further contact information can be found here:

www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/welsh-harp

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WELSH HARP STRATEGY GROUP

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