

Harrow Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Forum Environment & Sustainability Subgroup meeting

Notes from 6th meeting, held on Wednesday 06 February 2019 at 5.30pm
at the Lodge, 64 Pinner Road, Harrow, HA1 4HZ.

Attendees

Simon Braidman	Harrow Nature Conservation Forum – Acting Chair
Mick Oliver	Harrow University of the Third Age (Sustainability Group)
Gerry Devine	Harrow VCS Forum Vice-Chair, Harrow Community Transport
Swan Kazi	Harrow Parks Forum
Leslie Williams	Harrow Green Drinks
Steve Bolsover	Harrow Nature Conservation Forum
John Hollingdale	Harrow Friends of the Earth
Pamela Swain	Harrow Friends of the Earth
Margaret Huitson	Harrow Natural History Society
Jane Skelly	Harrow Friends of the Earth
Penny Hayward	Harrow Cyclists
Lucy Shuker	Thames 21 (Brent Catchment Partnership Development Manager)
Linda Robinson	38 Degrees Local Harrow Group - Notetaker
Michael Bradshaw	Harrow Council, Infrastructure Team
Steve Reader	Harrow Council, Operations Manager at Headstone Manor Museum
Ruta Akelyte	Thames Water, Environmental Protection Team
Kim Rodwell	Thames Water, Environmental Protection Team

Apologies

Jane Galbraith	Harrow Parks Forum, Harrow Recreation Ground Users Association
Stephen Mills	Friends of Headstone Manor Recreation Ground

1. **Welcome** by Simon, acting as meeting Chair this time. **Introductions** all round.
2. **Notes from the last meeting** (11 Sep) Responses still awaited, including from previous meetings:
 - 2.1 **Air Quality** – Response to Mick from Environment Portfolio Holder, Varsha Parmar – diffusion tube testing taking place at undisclosed locations for one year, lack of clarity over future use of more sophisticated hand held monitoring devices.
 - 2.2 **Kenton Recreation Ground** – No written guarantee yet sought by Harrow Parks Forum re future use of temporary car park, so prospects still uncertain.
 - 2.3 **Byron Park/Open Spaces Act** – Harrow Parks Forum still seeking legal advice on pursuing Freedom of Information request re building on park land. Fears of disturbing increase in size of development and encroachment on open space since departure of original planning officers and commissioned landscape designers (Periscope). No revised proposals seen.
Action:
Harrow Parks Forum to report on further proposals when known.
 - 2.4 **GLA's [Rogue Landlord Checker Scheme](#)** – New excuses received by Linda from Richard Le-Brun, Head of Community and Public Protection. In contrast to neighbouring boroughs, GLA's web resource still indicating no prosecutions against offending Harrow landlords despite many high profile media reports. Lack of useful information expected to continue.
Action:
Linda to chase up again.
 - 2.5 **Zero Waste Concept promotion** – No sign of success in persuading Communications team to mention 'Zero Waste' concepts anywhere in available media.

- 2.6 **Recycling Facilities at the Lodge** – No improvements noticed for community groups to recycle their waste at these council-owned premises.
- 2.7 **Compost Distribution** – No news about possibility of reintroducing the provision of soil improver for the community from Harrow's garden waste collections.
- 2.8 **Bins in Parks** – No response on feasibility of bins in parks for leaves and for recycling.
- 2.9 **Litter** – No evidence of anti-littering message in *Harrow People* or elsewhere. Littering fine figures not received as promised.
- 2.10 **Street skips** – Success of **Brent's** initiative still unknown.
- 2.11 **Food Waste Bins** – No developments on more appropriate food waste receptacles.

3. **Waterway Pollution and Misconnections – questions and discussion**

3.1 **Thames Water** – More streams and river catchments (Colne, Brent and Crane) in Harrow than in other boroughs, totalling 80km, half of which in pipes. Widespread pollution issues addressed through various projects. Programmes require approval from water regulator OFWAT as costs ultimately passed on to Thames Water's customers. Improvements measured e.g. litter, chemical levels, algal blooms, biological conditions (but not necessarily invertebrate numbers), and signed off by Environment Agency once rectified. Brent catchment misconnections found at 736 properties, 256 rectified – 21 polluted outfalls completely signed off in Harrow so far. Easily fixable individual problems being identified by 'Outfall Safari' projects (see 3.3 below). 200 polluted outfalls found in four years across Thames Water's region; 160 significantly improved as a result, including 42 in Harrow. 90 such investigations still ongoing. New strict conditions re drainage from restaurants and car washes – separate Thames Water teams responsible for such blockage hotspots and for prosecuting unlawful discharges (council not involved).

3.2 **Harrow Council** – Infrastructure consisting of 70 flood defences, 50 flood storage areas, three reservoirs and one dry impounding reservoir. Explanations for rise in misconnections: sudden introduction of new National Planning Policy Framework; planning laws weakened in order to stimulate market; substandard builds and cost-saving corner-cutting; loss of council oversight due to privatisation of building control; repeated reduction and restructuring of already understaffed Environmental Health department. Negative consequences inevitable. Very low funding from Harrow's revenue and capital streams for its Infrastructure Team (responsible for flood defence, flood storage etc.) Some grant funding available for specific projects. Infrastructure Team working closely with Harrow's policy teams on planning, flooding etc., and with other six West London boroughs on strategic flood risk assessments. 'Power of entry' held by council. Onus on property owners to fix misconnected drainage, otherwise council responsible for prosecuting. Letters threatening court action sent by Harrow's Infrastructure Team and also by Thames Water if necessary. No Harrow prosecutions yet. Some issues still outstanding e.g. major misconnections at one new build in Station Road, developer responsible. If not rectified, council itself able to remediate and recoup costs from developer by using its powers under the Building Act.

3.3 **River Brent Outfall Safari / [Brent Catchment Partnership](#)** – Outfall monitoring project (see 3.1 above) involving Thames 21, Thames Water, and Zoological Society of London. Publicity material given out by Lucy, seeking volunteers to identify polluted outfalls. Training event taking place at Harrow Civic Centre on Monday 25 February www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/river-brent-outfall-safari-registration-55273799422. More details available from Phoebe.ShawStewart@zsl.org.

Also separate opportunities for Brent Catchment Partnership to apply for monies from Environment Agency's Improvement Fund. Match funding then expected from other sources including Thames Water and councils (S106, Community Infrastructure Levy).

Action:

All to pass any ideas to Lucy for submission to Environment Agency for funding.

3.4 **Deculverting** – Now considered desirable to uncover many previously culverted waterways, but not happening comprehensively as separate time-consuming Environment Agency applications required from council for each instance. Successful application for Headstone Manor; Harrow Recreation Ground ‘on the radar’; Byron Park proposed (see 3.6 below); but most others expected to be just ‘modified’ instead.

3.5 **Dual Manholes** - Surface water and foul water drains running side by side. Originally designed for safe overflow in former times of ample foul water capacity, now frequently overloaded due to ageing networks, increased population and new developments. Suspected major contributing factor in recent Headstone Manor pollution incident (see 3.8 below). Numbers for such manholes in Harrow unavailable. Suspected at Newton Farm Ecology Park. Harrow’s Infrastructure Team calling for separated replacements. Thames Water responsible, no intention to replace as no consent from OFWAT for expenditure. Some remedial work being undertaken, expected to take up to fifteen years to complete.

Action:

Ruta to revert with figures for dual manholes in Harrow.

3.6 **Wealdstone Brook** – Increasingly frequent flooding caused by sudden surges due to changing climate bringing heavier storms plus lack of capacity for excess surface water, not so much because of any decrease in permeability of surrounding surface areas. Pollution in Kenton Recreation Ground caused by manhole overflows and blockages from tree root ingress damaging sewers, not by flooding. Deculverting proposed in Byron Park to reduce flood risk downstream. Council working with Friends of Byron Park on business case for new scheme, to be finalised this summer. Additional surface water expected to alleviate existing pollution levels. Project independent of and unaffected by stalled Byron Quarter development plans (see 2.3 above). Building Control aware of sewerage requirements and Thames Water involved in planning all new developments, so no foul waste expected from burgeoning population density. If scheme deemed viable (no Cabinet approval needed), designs to be drawn up. Partnership funding from Thames Water and Environment Agency.

Action:

Simon to share concept ideas for deculverting Wealdstone Brook in Byron Park.

Michael to ensure consultation with Friends of Byron Park before implementing plans.

3.7 **Yeading Brook** – Water quality being monitored (with three new monitoring points) by Citizen Crane project volunteers for Thames Water to analyse. Improvements achieved in Crane catchment downstream through other boroughs, but not yet at its source in Harrow...

3.8 **Headstone Manor** – Enforcement action against Persimmon Homes for causing major incident at head of Yeading Brook during recent construction work at Harrow View West, resulting in Persimmon agreeing to pay £8,000 in compensation to [Thames Valley Partnership](#). Reports of increased flooding in existing nearby gardens not proven to be caused by development; not on flood plain; Strict conditions applied, ‘attenuation ponds’ approved by drainage engineers. Aerating equipment provided by Thames Water to decontaminate moat, but desilting still required. Schedule for improvement work restricted by revenue-raising events being held at the Manor. Thames Water to begin work on misconnections in April. Linear reed bed system introduced as per information boards on site.

3.9 **Stanmore Marsh** – Reports of blockage in east drainage channel. Photographs sent to Ruta by Michael. Passed to appropriate Thames Water team for investigation. Meanwhile, sandbags being used to contain overflow.

Action:

Ruta and **Michael** to follow up on clearing Stanmore Marsh’s blocked drainage channel.

3.10 **Queensbury Park** – Sewage pollution reported. Thames Water ‘hotspot’ priority as manholes falling apart and over 200 misconnections identified. Weekly monitoring taking place.

Action:

Simon and **Michael** to check Queensbury Park site again.

Michael to consider requesting polluted water to be ‘tankered’.

Kim to advise Lucy re ongoing monitoring.

3.11 **Bentley Priory Nature Reserve** – Previous reports of poor water quality for aquatic life in Summerhouse Lake and dead fish in Temple Pond. Zinc pollution suspected from RAF HQ redevelopment, but requests for testing information ignored by Environment Agency, water authorities and council.

3.12 **How to help** – Visit www.connectright.org.uk for information and advice.

Report waterway pollution, suspected misconnections and mass dead fish incidents to Environment Agency by calling 0800 807060 or emailing ics@environment-agency.gov.uk (Incident Command System).

Also contact Thames Water on 0800 316 9800 (option 2 then 2 again).

Volunteer to take part in Outfall Safari projects (see 3.3 above). Unsure why prospective volunteer previously ignored – under new management now, so try again!

Citizen Science? Community groups currently unable to access Thames Water's testing facilities, but send any 'environmental information requests' via Thames Water's website.

Encourage unpaved driveways and improved surface drainage on private properties.

Install rainwater collection tanks for flushing toilets etc. – reduced surface run-off, discounts on Thames Water's sewerage charges and exemption from hosepipe bans.

3.13 **Cross-borough co-operation** – Pleasing return of ducks to Brent's Woodcock Park.

Praise for good cross-borough contacts and communication.

Action:

Lucy and **Swan** to encourage formation of cross-borough working group for Brent catchment.

4. **Other matters discussed**

4.1 **Climate Change Strategy** – Disappointment re council's abortive offer for community groups to influence council's new five year strategy on Climate Change. Ideas submitted by Subgroup members but misleadingly deflected by Corporate Director's erroneous insistence of focus only on energy saving measures in schools. Wasted opportunity to engage before ratification by Harrow's Cabinet last month. Contrary to last year's commitments by council to improve relationship with voluntary sector through appointment of Cabinet Advisor.

Action:

Gerry to take up the matter with Harrow's new Chief Executive via the Voluntary & Community Sector Forum's Management Board.

5. **Next meeting** – Ideas mooted about topic on what can be done in private premises and new developments to encourage wildlife, e.g. swift boxes/bricks. Decision to invite Environment Portfolio Holder, Varsha Parmar, to answer questions on various relevant subjects. Simon willing to take the chair once more.

Action:

Gerry to approach Varsha Parmar to arrange next Subgroup meeting with her. Date and venue details to be advised in due course.