



BRCS POSITION STATEMENT ON THE GURNELL LEISURE CENTRE REFURBISHMENT

Ealing Council has announced its intention to consult on the future of the Gurnell Leisure Centre with BRCS and others through a 'Sounding Board' process. The BRCS Trustees wish to work with the Council to protect and promote all aspects of the Brent River Park and we therefore issue the following statement:

Our position for this much loved section of the Brent River Park (BRP) is that we:

- 1) support the refurbishment of Gurnell Leisure Centre within the existing building footprint and roof height and expect the design to utilise energy efficient and sustainable technology and to incorporate a green roof.
- 2) support the retention of the BMX track and Playground within their existing footprints.
- 3) believe that the refurbished Leisure Centre should be designed to continue to provide a 50 m swimming pool, a junior pool and a gym and that these facilities should be focussed primarily on local users. Other elements such as a small cafeteria should enhance the experience of users and should not be included solely to generate revenue.
- 4) note the elevated and unrealistic cost estimates for refurbishment (£18 million according to Peter Mason in July 2021 and £40 million according to the Sounding Board briefing in May 2022) and ask that these be reviewed in light of the actual cost of other comparable recent projects in SE England.
- 5) object to any housing development within the BRP and ask Ealing Council to uphold national and local planning policy protecting Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land (MOL) from inappropriate development and to uphold its policies in the BRP Countryside Management Plan (Part 1, 1990), Local Agenda 21 Response (1998), Biodiversity Action Plan (2001) and Supplement (2022) and Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy (2021).
- 6) note that the land is wholly within the flood plain of the River Brent and object to any reduction in the flood water storage capacity or increase in the rate of rain water run-off from the site. In particular, we object to any proposal to create underground parking beneath the Leisure Centre as unsustainable. Any proposals should take full account of Ealing's Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (2016) and clearly evaluate the impacts and costs associated with building in or beside the flood plain in the light of climate change, and on river peak flows, surface water drainage, foul sewer capacity, flood risk management and on-site storage and attenuation.
- 7) note that the Council is currently reviewing Ealing's Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and our expert surveyors expect that when that process is complete substantial areas of neutral grassland habitat in the River Brent floodplain north of the Leisure Centre, the native species hedgerows in and around the main car park and the old hedgerow along Ruislip Road East will all need to be designated as SINCs. This review, when complete, will require a re-evaluation of any planning proposals for Gurnell Leisure Centre and likely constrain these within the existing building footprint and height.
- 8) object to any new footbridge over the River Brent within the existing SINC as our experts advise that this would increase disturbance of and damage to riverside habitats within the Long Field SINC and the Gurnell grasslands likely to be designated as SINC in the current review.

9) note that the Council is permitting a Car Wash to operate within the site and that grey water from this business is contaminating the River Brent and ask for this usage to be terminated.

10) note that the existing building and car park emit extensive light pollution into the Park affecting bat flight lines and feeding areas and ask that any future lighting scheme be properly designed to minimise any effect on wildlife and to avoid spillage. All such lighting should be switched off at 11 pm.

11) note that Gurnell Leisure Centre is a key access point for users of the BRP and ask that the Council take proactive steps to promote usage of the Park as well as the Leisure Centre for Ealing residents, including free parking in the Car Park for any vehicle with a valid Ealing resident's parking permit. Public assets (cafeteria, toilets etc.) within the Leisure Centre should be open and available to all BRP users and not restricted to those paying for specific activities such as swimming or gyms.

The Trustees of the Brent River & Canal Society

June 2022