

# **Barbecues in Waterlow Park - Report from Working Party**

31/1/20

## **Introduction**

The present report is from a Working Party tasked with reviewing issues from the 2019 season and making recommendations for 2020. The report is prepared for the Trust Advisory Group and to be available publicly. All recommendations ratified by the Trust Advisory Group will be implemented subject to cost and management resources from Camden and in partnership with the Friends of Waterlow Park (FoWP).

Waterlow Park has been used for BBQs for the last few years following a policy decision by Camden Council. Camden is one of only two Councils in London to allow barbecues in all its parks. Waterlow Park is the largest park Camden manage, and now arguably the most popular barbecue destination in London. As barbecues are banned on nearby Hampstead Heath and all Corporation of London and central London Royal Parks, demand is concentrated and much higher than it would be from the normal park visitor base, with many travelling significant distances to barbecue in the Park.

With rising demand and a significant number of barbecues scattered throughout the park, there were frequent complaints from regular park users living nearby and negative comment especially in the letters column of local press about enjoyment of the park being compromised, especially by smoke, smells and litter. To address this growing problem barbecues were zoned for the first time in 2019, the introduction being completed by July 2019. New coal bins, signage and communications were organised. Following a bedding in period the new system has seen an improvement, but problems remain and there are questions about air quality and health, waste management and more.

## **Issues from the 2019 season**

Camden Staff and FoWP volunteers separately monitored numbers of barbecues and behaviour through the season<sup>1</sup>. The following is a summary of issues using their data combined with additional feedback received by the Working Party.

There were high numbers on peak days, when up to about 40 barbecues might be concurrently active on a single day. Over the period surveyed, there was increasing compliance with the new regulations, once people understood what they were.

However, on days of heavy use, barbecuing imposes considerable pressure on space and a lot of smoke which has the potential to affect children in the play zones and

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<sup>1</sup> The monitoring only covers the times and days when id verde, Camden staff or volunteers were on site.

people walking in the area, which they may be unable to avoid, and there are also waste problems.

Groups of more than 20 people require advance permission and payment of a fee. This is not something people are sufficiently aware of, and on many occasions there were unofficial groups of this size and larger.

Behaviour can be an issue. Whilst over 80% of barbecues logged were deemed 'good' behaviourally, others were less so, playing loud music or being associated with poor or even anti-social behaviour of various kinds.

Disposable barbecues, banned under the regulations are still in use. It is estimated that at least 30% of barbecues are still disposables<sup>2</sup>, while 70% have moved to non-disposables.

Damage to grass from disposable barbecues is a continuing problem, There were 42 reported instances, of which 9 were after the full introduction of zoning.

Barbecues outside of zones were frequent at the start of the 2019 season with new rules unfamiliar. Numbers breaking the zoning rules after full introduction were much reduced, but out of zone barbecues remain an issue.

Cars are known to have entered the park without authorisation on at least 5 occasions related to larger barbecue parties. A moped was also seen.

Early in the season two dogs were reported as having eaten meat still attached to skewers and require operations. It is believed a further dog may have died (unconfirmed). Some dog walkers have become wary of going into the park.

High volumes of rubbish meant that bins overflowed. Barbecue coal bins were available to deal with hot waste, (although some ignored advice to cool hot coals) but general waste is disposed of in standard bins and these proved inadequate, on many occasions resulting in food waste being put in coal bins and litter piled by them and requiring effort from gardeners and volunteers to deal with beyond the waste management services provided by Veolia. Waste management improved as zoning was introduced but is still a significant challenge not yet satisfactorily resolved.

Some regular park users are deterred by barbecues as they find their presence intrusive enough to avoid the park entirely. Especially for the more elderly; this may mean that they are not enjoying the health benefits of outdoor exercise and social

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<sup>2</sup> It seems that some people are collecting bricks or stones from around the park to lift disposable BBQs off the ground- this might be a H&S issue.

interaction in their local green space. The Working Party has received a number of reports from local residents saying they do not use the park when there are barbecues.

Evening barbecues resulted in a significant rise in the number of people getting locked in the park at night after the gates had closed and having to seek assistance to get out.

### **Public opinion.**

Barbecues are highly contentious. Clearly, those who participate in barbecues enjoy the opportunity and are keen to highlight social benefit and maintain this facility. It would appear that regular and local park users are more likely to oppose barbecues. Some are very strongly opposed. Families with small children and dog owners are more likely to be concerned, not without good reason, given the harm that may come to their pets from 'foraging' for food.

There were two petitions in 2019 about barbecues in Waterlow Park, one in favour and one against. The petition in favour was taken in the park, with a fair number of signatories being those participating in barbecues. It attracted 225 signatures. It read:

#### *TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN*

*We the undersigned would urge Camden Council to continue their policy of allowing responsible barbecuing within Waterlow Park. The park was donated by Sir Sidney Waterlow, to the people of London, as a 'garden for the gardenless'. In this day and age, people who have gardens, particularly the young, use them to have a barbecue. We believe that the people of London who do not have gardens should have the opportunity to entertain friends and family by holding a barbecues. We believe that this contributes to social wellbeing of London.*

Another petition against barbecues was run online on the [democracy.camden.gov.uk](https://democracy.camden.gov.uk) website and attracted 151 signatures. It read:

*We the undersigned petition the council to Ban BBQs in Waterlow Park, N6 to curb CO2 emissions and other pollutants*

*One grilling session on a charcoal BBQ emits the same amount of CO2 as a car driving 22 miles.*

*Camden have already banned some ice cream vans as their engines idle and pump out CO2 and particulates. Hackney council have banned BBQs as they discovered that barbecuing for two or more hours resulted in 'very high' localised levels of particulate matter pollution during the summer of 2018. From mid-June 2019, Camden have decided to restrict BBQs in Waterlow Park to two zones: the*

*bandstand area and the large patch of grass near the cemetery. However, the children's play area is sandwiched right between these two zones. So children will be exposed to concentrated levels of toxic smoke and particulates. Camden Green party measured air quality in various parts of north London and the junction next to Waterlow Park (Highgate Hill, Dartmouth Park Road and Hornsey Lane) is already in the 'black zone' for toxic NO<sub>2</sub>, nitrogen dioxide, (the darker the level, the higher the NO<sub>2</sub> levels).*

*Parks are the lungs of our cities and are places where we hope to breathe unpolluted air, not toxic BBQ fumes. I urge you to sign this petition to ban BBQs in Waterlow Park to help the future of our planet and the health and wellbeing of Londoners. Let's encourage people to have picnics instead of polluting our green spaces and adding to the problem that is climate emergency.*

The Barbecue Working Party ran its own consultation<sup>3</sup>, which was advertised through local channels including the Friends, the Highgate Society, the Neighbourhood Forum and Nextdoor.co.uk This attracted 29 written responses. Of those expressing a clear view for or against barbecues 28 % were in favour and 72 % against. (4 responses were neutral)

Some of the positive points made were:

*Opportunity for people without gardens to BBQ  
Opportunity for family and cultural celebrations*

Negative points included: (Many omitted where covered elsewhere)

*Play area next to zones - smoke bad for children  
Smell (including some distance away)  
Unhealthy: Carcinogens in smoke / Hard to breathe / asthma  
Bad example in terms of climate change mitigation / CO<sub>2</sub>  
BBQs & smoke significantly impacts enjoyment of the wider Park  
Negatively impacts wildlife  
Signage ugly / intrusive*

Public opinion is an important consideration in determining the future of barbecues in the Park. Frequent park users in particular should be heard. As things stand there are very strong opinions but no overwhelming conclusion to be drawn. Public opinion must therefore be heard in making forward decisions, but needs to be understood in tandem with other considerations.

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<sup>3</sup> From Nov 19 to mid Jan 20

## **Public Health and Safety - Air Quality**

The impact of barbecues on air quality, and how this should be responded to in relation to public enjoyment of a park when there are barbecues is a particularly difficult area<sup>4</sup>. Ideally there would be public guidance on safe levels of exposure for different groups, and clear recommendations about smoke in public places. There are various resources dealing with particulate exposure, but these tend to be concerned with public health at a much larger scale and in relation to traffic along busy highways. What can be said is that any exposure to particulates, accelerants and gasses in smoke from barbecues is not good. Low level exposure is unlikely to be dangerous especially for a healthy person, whereas with sustained exposure a negative health impact becomes increasingly likely, particularly for asthmatics and young children.

Advice was sought on this issue from Air Quality Officers in Camden and Islington and further research carried out. Specifically the question of any maximum allowable density of barbecues was asked given that the more there are in any given area the higher the pollution. The answer was that there is no guideline on this and it might be difficult to calculate aggregate emissions in a particular open space in such a way as to formulate a maximum allowable density. A PM2.5 level above 34.4 per cubic meter is deemed unhealthy. There is currently no data from Waterlow Park, though it is hoped some can be gathered in the coming year. What can be said is that 2016 data from Highbury Fields when there were barbecues gave the highest 24 hour average as 19.3 micrograms. All the top 100 15 minute average recordings were well over 25, with the level often staying at over 25 for hours at a time. At this level it is said that “*unusually sensitive individuals may experience respiratory symptoms.*”<sup>5</sup>

A lack of readings for Waterlow Park aside this makes it sound as though there is no great problem from barbecues, but clearly this is too simplistic a view. On days when air quality is already bad there is particular concern that barbecue smoke will compound the issue, locally adding to negative health impacts of air pollution. Should barbecues still be allowed on days where there is moderate to high background pollution?<sup>6</sup>

## **Public Health and Safety - Fire risk**

The fire brigade have in the past been called to Waterlow Park to put out bin fires started by coals which were not properly extinguished. When there is a heatwave there is a particular risk of fires spreading, and Waterlow Park has imposed temporary bans on the recommendation of the fire services. Similar bans may be expected in future.

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<sup>4</sup>See <https://molekule.science/bbq-smoke-bad-for-health/>

<sup>5</sup> See <https://blissair.com/what-is-pm-2-5.htm> for some background to particulate measurement

<sup>6</sup> DEFRA has air quality guidelines and links to current conditions and forecasts <https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/air-pollution/daqj>

## Costs

Direct costs in 2019 came to £5,709. Indirect costs are difficult to estimate but include allocations for staff time both from Camden and on-site contractors. Notionally they are estimated at a further £5,000.

2020 direct costs are likely to be £1,500. An indirect costs allocation can remain at £5,000

## Recommendations for 2020 season

Barbecues to continue in the same zoned areas as 2019<sup>7</sup>.

1. 7pm to become the cut-off time for barbecues. This is to allow time for people to tidy up and leave the park in good order, minimising chances of getting locked in, and should reduce poorly disposed rubbish and anti-social behaviour.
2. Restrict the barbecue season from the 20th March<sup>8</sup> to 30th September. Outside of these dates 7pm becomes too late a time to be meaningful as daylight hours are shorter.
3. Internal barriers at the Swains Lane and Dartmouth Park Hill gate are to be kept closed at all times to avoid unauthorised vehicles being driven into the Park.
4. Suitable general refuse bins to be installed next to each of the two coal bin locations, only for the duration of the barbecue season.
5. The Friends of Waterlow Park to consider how communication with the public might be improved even further to ensure rules are understood. In the first instance to report proposals back to the Barbecue Working Party, and subject to agreement then to work with Camden to assist in the Park on agreed dates. Particular consideration needs to be given to how to usefully advise and support dog owners and other regular park users who are not barbecuing. Some points to consider include:

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<sup>7</sup> Because of extreme pressure on the designated areas some days, Camden staff and iDverde to be advised that a spill-over zone is permissible around the octagonal shelter, just the other side of the path to the upper designated zone. Barbecues must avoid lower boughs of trees or proximity to longer grass down the slope of the hill. This spill-over area will not be advertised.

<sup>8</sup> The Iranian festival of Nowruz is the 20/3, but Sizdah Bedar - when celebrations include picnics and barbecues is 13 days later; Wednesday the 1st April. Waterlow Park has become an important venue for groups celebrating.

- a. Safe disposal of BBQ accelerants
  - b. Safe use of ash bins
  - c. Encouraging people to take waste home
6. The Friends of Waterlow Park to create a section on their website about barbecues in the park with guidelines and advice. This to use revised Camden material based on information circulated last year and extended information where appropriate. The website to also encourage feedback in a manner that makes it apparent that both positive and negative responses are valued.
  7. Camden to review / update their website and provide links to relevant Friends content.
  8. Camden to revisit the posters and leaflets to see how the designs might be simplified, (particularly minimising words) and made to stand out in a way that is in keeping with the Park<sup>9</sup>.
  9. Spray painting of paths to be more selective than last season.
  10. Monitoring to be undertaken through the season by Camden and iDverde of numbers, behaviour and issues, as was the case with the 2019 season.
  11. Air quality monitoring to be undertaken by Camden from a new site in Swains Lane with data supplied for 'baseline' (non barbecue days) and barbecue days. Further monitoring to be organised by the Barbecue Working Party with the Friends of Waterlow Park using a hand-held PM2.5 monitor.
  12. Standardised sign by the entrance to the hedged "events" enclosure to clarify the requirement to book ahead with Camden for groups of over 20 as only large groups are allowed in this area.
  13. No large groups are allowed to hold parties in other hedged areas including the orchard.
  14. Camden to ensure staff on site are fully briefed on zones, safety, rules and how to deal with people who are in breach of them.

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<sup>9</sup> Restrictions to barbecues after 7pm will need to be added, along with re-iterating the requirement for people to apply for permission to the events service for gatherings of more than 20 people.



