

# Waterlow Park Barbecue Working Group

## Report

### History and Background

In 1889 Waterlow Park was given by Sir Sydney Waterlow to the people of London to be

“a Public Park for the people in perpetuity ... to the end and intent that the same premises shall and may forever be used as and for a Public Park to be dedicated to the Recreation of the Public.”

The London Borough of Camden is the trustee of that trust, and it is advised by the Waterlow Park Trust Advisory Group.

In 2014 Camden adopted a policy to allow barbecues in its parks. Since that date other London local authorities have banned barbecuing in their open spaces, and in 2023 when Islington banned barbecuing in its parks (save for one electric barbecue site) Camden became the only local council in London to allow barbecues in its parks. Southwark has very recently (August 2024) installed electric barbecues in one of its parks.

As Waterlow Park, being by some way the biggest and most attractive park managed by Camden, has become recognised as the best place for barbecuing in a public space in London, and as the alternative spaces outside Camden have been closed to barbecuing, so there have been larger numbers of people wanting to use the Park to barbecue. The second best place – from an internet search – is Lincoln’s Inn Fields, also in Camden. The increased use of Waterlow Park for barbecuing led to the introduction of zoning in 2019. There are now two areas in which barbecuing is permitted and it is prohibited in the rest of the Park. The current rules for barbecuing are:

- Barbecues are allowed only within the designated zones
- Disposable barbecues are not to be used (as they stand directly on the ground they burn the vegetation or roots beneath them, leaving burnt patches)
- Groups of more than 20 require permission
- Barbecuing must end by 7pm.

(The full rules are at [www.camden.gov.uk/barbeques-in-camden-parks](http://www.camden.gov.uk/barbeques-in-camden-parks).)

The ability to barbecue in Waterlow Park is thus a community benefit which is not matched elsewhere in London. In the surveys by Camden Park Services over the last two summers the top three reasons given for barbecuing in Waterlow Park were: it is easy to get to, there is nowhere else to barbecue, and there is plenty of space. As well as the festival of Sizdah Behar, see below, groups have also barbecued in the Park when celebrating Eid and Ukrainian Independence Day. Seventy-nine percent of those responding said they did not have access to a garden where they could barbecue, and most lived in rented accommodation. Groups barbecuing were ethnically and culturally diverse, Asian and Asian/British being the most numerous categories.

At Easter 2024 the celebrations of the Iranian festival Sizdah Bedar in Waterlow Park involved an estimated 1,000 people, many barbecues, music and dancing. No prior permission was sought. The event overflowed the allocated barbecue zones and took over a significant segment of the Park. Many people wrote to complain that it should not have been allowed. This Working Group was set up as a

direct result. One of the first decisions of the Working Group was if the event is to happen again – as is likely – in some respects different considerations will apply from those which should be applied to ordinary weekends and weekdays.

## **The Working Group**

This Working Group was set up to make recommendations to the Waterlow Park Trust Advisory Group about the management of barbecues in Waterlow Park. The Working Group has held three meetings.

The members of the Working Group were:

Francis Wilkinson, Secretary, Highgate Society (Chair)  
Ian Dungavell, Chief Executive, Highgate Cemetery  
Rachel Kelly, park user, local resident  
Gabi Howard, Park Services Manager, LB Camden  
Louise Lewis, local resident, Member of previous Working Party, Friend of Waterlow Park  
Fiona Brown, Chair of Friends of Waterlow Park  
Mehrddad Aref-Adib, Organiser of Iranian cultural events in Lauderdale House

Ian Henghes, who chairs the Trust Advisory Group, also attended but has not contributed to the writing of this report.

The Camden councillors for the Highgate Ward (Lorna Russell, Camron Aref-Adib and Anna Wright) were invited and responded. Councillor Anna Wright attended the final meeting.

Rachel Kelly and Mehrddad Aref-Adib attended the first meeting and had no other involvement.

### **Brief**

The Brief provided to the Working Party by the Trust Advisory Group is attached at Appendix 1. It identified the issues to be addressed, which are listed below together with further issues identified by members of the Working Group.

### **Range of views**

The members of the Working Group represent the range of views, from those who fully support the continuation of barbecuing in the Park more or less as it is now, to those who want barbecuing banned completely. It follows that there is no possibility of this report expressing conclusions which have the agreement of all members of the Working Group. Responsibility for the recommendations lies with the Chair.

The Working Group met on three occasions: 11.6.24, 8.8.24 and 4.9.24. At the first meeting the issues were identified and work allocated, the second meeting reviewed the work done and identified outstanding matters which required more research, and the third meeting considered all the information available and this report in draft.

## **Issues**

The following concerns were identified either in the Brief or by Members of the Working Group:

1. Air quality. This means not just the formal measurements of air quality, such as the levels of particulates, but also visible smoke and smells

2. Other environmental harms. This includes damage to vegetation, wildlife and pets, and also the fact that barbecue charcoal is mainly from African hardwoods which are not replaced
3. Signage. This includes signs showing the rules for barbecuing, and also signs for toilets
4. Compliance. Not all barbecuers comply with the rules so enforcement is an issue
5. Waste management. This covers both barbecue and human waste
6. Parking and traffic management.
7. Overcrowding. This includes the exceptional crowds at Sizdah Behar in 2024, as well as the numbers on sunny summer weekends.

These will be addressed in turn. It was necessary for the Working Party to address the issues raised, but that could give the impression that barbecuing in Waterlow Park is only a problem. That is not the case at all: there are community benefits particularly in permitting culturally-related barbecuing and in providing a space, as Sir Sydney Waterlow intended, where people without access to their own outside space can socialise outdoors. It is emphasised that it underlies all our considerations that barbecuing in Waterlow Park is an event enjoyed by thousands of people every year.

In order to be in a position to make recommendations the Working Group between them paid many visits to the Park while barbecuing was in progress, as did Camden staff (see Appendices 2 and 3), and we researched electric barbecues.

#### 1. Air Quality

‘Poor air quality is considered by the government to be “the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK”. As well as human health, air pollution also has implications for the natural environment and for the economy.’ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9600>. The internationally agreed measures of air quality cover large particulates, small particulates, nitrous oxides and ozone. The large and small particulates and to some extent the nitrous oxides are relevant to charcoal barbecuing.

Portable barbecues are a source of air pollution and health risk for people using Camden parks. Children, older people and people with long-term health conditions are especially vulnerable. Adjacent to the Park is Channing Junior School, a little further away is St Josephs Primary School. The children will usually not be present there over the weekends when most barbecuing takes place, but barbecuing in the Park is not confined to weekends.

In 2023 the Government set lower levels for small particulate pollution, reducing the level to be achieved from  $20\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  to  $10\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ , this target to be met by 2040. While parts of Camden met the previous target level, everywhere in Camden currently exceeds the new target level. The Local Air Quality Management Framework underpinned by the Environment Act 1995 sets local limits, put into place through the Air Quality (England) Regulations 2000. As a result Camden has put in place a Clean Air Strategy.

Charcoal burning causes air pollution through the particulates emitted. Camden’s 2022-26 Clean Air Action Plan comments:

“Commercial cooking is the single biggest source of PM2.5 emissions in Camden. Charcoal grills, wood-fired ovens, deep-fat frying, and gas stoves and ovens all produce significant amounts of air pollution.” And “Charcoal grills and wood-fired pizza ovens are major sources

of air pollution in Camden.”

While the above refers particularly to commercial barbecues, it would be consistent to have a policy to reduce the use of charcoal barbecues generally. There is no legislation to control what is burned for barbecues in private gardens which means that Camden’s control of charcoal barbecues outside can only apply to its own open spaces. Camden’s view is that “The Council’s air quality strategy and Clean Air Action Plan support measures to reduce air pollution from barbecues in parks and open spaces”.

A visitor to the Park on a sunny summer weekend afternoon, if aware of the barbecues, will be aware first of the cooking and charcoal-burning smells, and then of the smoke. It is obvious that there will be a comparatively high level of particles in the air immediately round a charcoal-burning barbecue. Depending on the weather that smoke and smell may stay in a small area or may drift to other parts of the Park and outside the Park into the adjacent Highgate Cemetery and Highgate and Dartmouth Park Hills, sometimes reaching as far as Highgate Village. Ian Dungavell complains of the smoke and cooking smells being unpleasant for people visiting graves in the adjacent Highgate Cemetery.

An air quality survey conducted by Ian Henghes with a hand-held monitor in 2022 “established that barbecues have a measurable impact when present in the Park, both in the zones they occupy and areas next to the zones. The further from the barbecues the less the impact as might be expected, but this is highly dependent on the movement of air. Smoke may take time to dissipate.” As any summer weekend visitor to the Park knows, smoke blows over the paths and is not confined to the barbecue areas.

Islington has a similar air quality policy to Camden. The principal reason for their ban on charcoal barbecues in their parks and open spaces in 2023 was the effect of those barbecues on air quality, see <https://democracy.islington.gov.uk/documents/s31540/Exec%209.2.23%20-%20BBQ%20Policy%20Review%202022%20-%20v4%20signed.pdf> and attachments. Of course LB Camden can set its own policy which may differ.

## 2. Other Environmental Harms

Gas barbecues, and disposable barbecues which sit directly on the ground, are not permitted in the Park. Gas barbecues are not permitted for safety reasons and there are no reports of gas barbecues being used, so they are not considered further. Disposable barbecues are not permitted because they burn any vegetation or roots beneath them, as well as any insects that may be there, thereby causing burnt patches on the grass and harming the roots even of quite large trees. However, while they are not seen as often as they used to be, disposable barbecues can be found being used every weekend when barbecuing takes place. Once a disposable barbecue has been lit it is hot and dangerous to move so creates an enforcement issue unless the barbecue is to be stopped completely (a watering can would work). In practice therefore, with the current informal enforcement, the only thing that can safely be done about the use of disposable barbecues is to advise people not to use them in the Park again.

The effect on larger wildlife can be considered through the effects there have been on dogs. Many people walk their dogs in the Park and there are two recorded occasions where dogs have suffered significant injury through the metal left behind in the Park by barbecuers, in particular from skewers. It is reasonable to suppose that such injuries will be more common among foxes, as scavengers, and one can only speculate about injuries to squirrels and smaller mammals.

The UK is the world’s eighth largest importer of charcoal ([oec.world/en/profile/hs/wood-charcoal-including-shell-or-nut-charcoal](https://oec.world/en/profile/hs/wood-charcoal-including-shell-or-nut-charcoal)) and it is estimated that about 80% of the charcoal burned in the UK is

from tropical forests where the wood is not replaced. While this is only a small proportion of the charcoal used from those forests, much of which is burned by people who live near the forests, it remains something which should be prevented as far as possible.

#### 1. Signage and toilets

There are two signage issues. The first is the clarity and adequacy of the present signs stating the rules about barbecuing which are displayed in the Park. It was felt by some members of the Working Group that these signs should be improved to make their meaning clearer.

The second issue is the signing to toilets. This is a long-running issue in the Park, which has been agreed in principle but no progress has been made. It is suggested that the lack of signs to the toilets means that people do not know where they are, or indeed whether there are any, and so they use the Park, for example behind the hedges alongside the Highgate East Cemetery which is quite close to the barbecue areas. Such use of the Park is obviously unpleasant for other park users, for those with dogs in particular, and for visitors to the East Cemetery. The erection of signs to the toilets should be completed as a priority. Ian Dungavell offered to contribute if the signs included directions to the Cemetery.

The possibility of temporary toilets being provided for the summer months alongside Swain's Lane where there would be convenient water and sewage connections has been investigated. The cost estimate from Portakabin however is substantial: about £12,000 for a 13-week season including plumbing, delivery and removal for a single unit, and a further £5,000 for each additional unit. It might be more economical to build a permanent block (subject to planning and funding).

The cost of providing more toilets suggests that the first step should be signs to the existing toilets, which may be all that is needed.

#### 1. Compliance

It is not to be expected that all the rules about barbecues will be complied with in the absence of any enforcement. Common breaches of rules are:

- Barbecuing outside the permitted areas
- Using disposable barbecues
- Having groups of more than 20 without permission
- Barbecuing later than 7pm
- The use of amplified music and loud hailers.

Enforcement currently consists of

- One employee of IdVerde who is a gardener (not a security employee) present in the Park. That member of staff has a visible presence in the park, and engages with BBQ users and hands out leaflets outlining the BBQ guidelines when necessary.
- Volunteers. Some members of the Friends and of the Trust Advisory Group visit barbecuers who are in the wrong area or using disposable barbecues and give them advice. The advice is usually taken well, though is not necessarily effective (the difficulty of moving a disposable barbecue has been mentioned).
- Security officers. Camden employed security officers for two days over the May and August

Bank Holiday weekends in 2024. They were able to ensure that barbecuers kept to the designated areas. There was no overcrowding on the August weekend.

Apart from the large Iranian event over the Easter 2024 weekend, where parties exceed 20 it is generally not by much and no problems result. Where barbecues are still going at 7pm and the Park does not shut until 9 or 9.30pm it is understood that no particular problem arises, though sometimes people have to be encouraged to leave at locking-up time. The ban on disposable barbecues and on barbecuing outside the allocated areas however are, it is felt, important to enforce and currently that is not regularly or effectively done. The Working Group felt that the use of amplified music and loud hailers detracts from other people's enjoyment of the Park and it should also be actively prevented.

#### 1. Waste Management

Veolia are contracted to provide large bins for barbecue waste at weekends. Of course not everyone is equally meticulous about clearing up their waste, but generally the system works. Regular adjustments are made to ensure that remains the case. The subject of human waste is covered under 3. Above.

#### 1. Parking and traffic management

While many barbecuers in the Park are local and can walk to the Park, because there is nowhere comparable in North London which permits barbecues in public open spaces people come from considerable distances, and some bring so much equipment that a vehicle is necessary even if they don't live very far away.

The issues are different on the two sides of the Park. On the east side there is parking on Highgate Hill, and if that is full there are roads on the Haringey side of Highgate Hill with plenty of available parking spaces over the weekend. There is no particular problem here.

However the west side is more convenient for the designated spaces, especially if tables, chairs and quantities of food and drink are being brought, as well as the barbecue itself. Vehicles are then parked in Swain's Lane. The whole of the west side of Swain's Lane from south of Highgate Cemetery to north of Bisham Gardens has double yellow lines and parking is not allowed at any time. On the east side of Swain's Lane between 40 metres south of the Cemetery entrance and the northern boundary of the Lodge in Waterlow Park there are also double yellow lines; north of that point there is a single yellow line which restricts parking only between 10am and noon.<sup>1</sup> Where there are double yellow lines on both sides of Swain's Lane they are necessary because the road is too narrow to leave space for passing traffic if anything wider than a small car is parked there. At summer weekends however there are always cars parked on that stretch. While they will not always be barbecuers and may be people visiting the Park to walk or picnic, or people visiting the Cemetery, because barbecuers have more to carry they have an incentive to park on that stretch which is close to the Park entrance nearest to the barbecue areas. It can be impossible for large cars to pass parked cars on that stretch and congestion is a common result. This is a regular source of complaint from Highgate Cemetery, where visitors are inconvenienced.

This problem could be solved by employing parking attendants to place warning stickers on vehicles parked illegally one weekend, and to place parking tickets on any vehicles there the next two or three weekends. Not only should this deal with the parking problem but it would provide revenue for Camden. This should be pursued with the responsible officer in Camden.

#### 1. Overcrowding

### i. Special occasions

In 2024 the Iranian Sizdah Behar celebration was at Easter weekend and the weather was good. On both the Sunday and the Monday there was a much larger than usual number of people barbecuing, estimated to be about 1,000. They occupied a substantial segment of the Park so that regular users felt excluded and alienated. No permission had been asked for from Camden.

Sizdah Behar is on Wednesday 2 April 2025 which is not close to a public holiday. It is likely to be celebrated on the closest weekend day, so either on Sunday 30 March or on Saturday 5 April, or possibly both. If this event is to happen again, which seems very likely and it will involve barbecues unless they are prohibited, it will be necessary, and Camden's Park Services have agreed to:

- o Proactively look for any advertised events early ahead of time, and signpost those groups to the events team, also highlighting festival grant funding opportunities – i.e. not just stick but also carrot.
- o Network with Persian community groups and contacts to share BBQ Guidelines, ask people to take their litter and recycling home, care for the Park and highlight the public toilets available in the Park and in Pond Square. Highlight the impact on neighbours including Highgate Cemetery.
- o Encourage litter pick volunteering with communications material and leaving litter pickers and bags for people to use.
- o Give consideration to additional rubbish bins and collections to be booked with Veolia, as well as working with IdVerde to make sure they have enough resources.
- o Arrange and pay for additional toilet cleaning at the Waterlow Park centre Building.
- o Procure a security patrol, to reinforce BBQ guidelines and promote responsible and considerate behaviour when the park is very busy.

In addition to these steps it will be helpful if Camden can, in conjunction with the Friends of Waterlow Park and the Trust Advisory Group:

- o Allocate a suitable area of the Park into which the event can overflow if necessary,
- o Consider charging a fee to help meet the costs of waste clearance and reinstatement, and
- o Let other Park users know in advance so that they can plan to use a different part of the Park if they wish and so they understand that this is a special occasion and not how it will be for other weekends in the year.

### i. Regular weekends

The designated area for barbecues can accommodate about 300 people. In 2024 there were at least three weekends when that number was exceeded. On the last July weekend on one day there were 535 people at barbecues. Those numbers of necessity overflowed the designated areas. In the absence of any effective enforcement there were many barbecues in those undesignated areas. If charcoal barbecues are to continue to be permitted, then:

- o The areas currently designated should be retained
- o There should be greater clarity as to what is included in the areas – specifically whether the

grass round the circular tarmac area is all included or not

- o The clarity and positioning of the signs should be reviewed
- o There should be enforcement, which is necessary: to prevent barbecuing in other areas; to prevent the use of disposable barbecues; and to prevent the use of amplified sound. Restricting barbecues to the designated areas has been effective recently when done by security staff, though it would not be possible with the numbers seen at the end of July this year.

## Options

Some options have been included in the preceding discussion on issues. Options considered by Working Party members to be worthy of inclusion in this report were:

- Continue the present arrangements with some improvements
- Allow barbecuing as at present but barbecuers would require permission through a booking system
- Ban charcoal barbecues and install electric barbecues
- Ban barbecues in the Park entirely.

As they have not previously been mentioned, it will assist the remainder of this report if electric barbecues are considered first. There follows consideration of each of the above options in turn.

### Electric barbecues

Electric barbecues open to the public are fairly new to the UK, but have been available for many years in Australia. D A Christie, the principal supplier, say they have been making them for 60 years. They have been installed in some London boroughs – Southwark and Islington – and outside London in Bournemouth. They require a supply of electricity. There are at least two financial models for public electric barbecues. The Bournemouth model is to supply the barbecue and electricity free with no booking system, so that a user can press a button to warm up the hotplate, and once it is warm has 20 minutes to cook their food before the hotplate turns itself off. Bournemouth has about 30 barbecues, mostly along the sea front. The Islington model, provided by Evergrill, is that people book and pay online for one hour, which provides 50 minutes of usable time. Southwark have begun, at the end of August 2024, their trial of electric barbecues, which at present are free to use.

Since they banned charcoal barbecues Islington have installed one double electric barbecue in Paradise Park. It is was in use on the two occasions when members of the Working Group visited. As the power is turned on and off remotely the hours of operation can be fixed to suit the venue, and the booking system shows the times when the barbecue is available. The booking and use of the grill is through a phone app; the process is described by Evergrill at <https://www.evergrill.co.uk>. The Evergrill barbecues:

- Are double: both can be booked by the same person, or two different people
- Parties can book (and pay for) more than one hour if they need to
- There are rubbish buckets under the grills which would need to be emptied, no doubt by Veolia in our case. The amount of waste would be less than at present
- They are described as vandal-resistant.



There may be between 20 and 50 charcoal barbecues in Waterlow Park on a sunny summer weekend day. If the electric grills were available for 6 hours (say 1pm to 7pm) then 5 double barbecues would provide 60 one-hour periods of grilling. That should be enough to cope with the usual current level of demand. It would not however be sufficient for the numbers attending the Park for Sizdah Behar this year.

There would be an initial cost. It would be necessary to provide an electricity supply as well as the cost of the grills themselves. The Working Group has not entered into negotiations with Evergrill but has contacted Islington and Southwark about their financial arrangements and Southwark invested around £90,000 in setting up their three double barbecues. It may be possible in the future to apply for grant funding for the installation of electric barbecues in Waterlow Park, and elsewhere in Camden.

There are several benefits of electric barbecuing over the current arrangements:

- Less air pollution
- Less environmental harm to tropical forests
- Less smoke and smell (food smells would continue)
- Less damage to the Park
- It provides an effective limit on the numbers of people who can barbecue in the Park
- It requires all barbecuing to be done where the electric grills are located.

There may also be drawbacks:

- The electric barbecues would change the look of part of the Park, and they would be fixtures. In order not to reduce the amount of green space in the Park the electric barbecues could be located on the tarmac circle in the centre of the current permitted barbecue zones.
- That location would involve some barbecuers carrying food to parts of the Park not immediately adjacent to the barbecues, and so reduce the sense of an 'event' where the barbecuing provides a social focus.
- Charcoal smoke provides some of the flavour of barbecued food, which would be lost.

Waterlow Park is listed at Grade II\* by English Heritage. Permission would be required to erect the barbecues.

1. Present arrangements with some improvements

If the current arrangements are to continue then there should be

- Clear signs to toilets, one or more sited near barbecue areas (these are necessary in any event)
- Formal enforcement to prevent the use of disposable barbecues, to prevent barbecues being set up outside the designated areas, and to prevent the use of amplified sound. Such enforcement need not necessarily be on every summer weekend day. Occasional enforcement would set rules for barbecuers, particularly those who are regular
- Clear signs showing what, where and when barbecuing is permitted
- More effective parking control in Swain's Lane (also necessary in any event)

- Easy access to the Camden web-page about barbecues in Waterlow Park
- Up to date posts on the Friends of Waterlow Park account on X.

1. Barbecuing with permission only

A system could be set up, for example through Eventbrite or a similar website, requiring people to register and obtain a ticket, either by email or through an app on their phone, in order to be permitted to barbecue.

Any such system will only work if staff are employed to check tickets. As there is not much barbecuing on weekdays (save for public holidays), the booking system would only be needed on weekends and public holidays, and the tickets of potential barbecuers entering the Park would need to be checked on those days. As people come from both sides of the Park at least two people would be needed to check tickets; four might be a more realistic number. It would be necessary to turn away people without tickets, as once people set up there is more potential for confrontation if they are told to stop.

A fee could be charged for the tickets to at least partially cover the cost of staffing the ticket checking. Unlike the position at Kenwood, for example, there is no requirement in the Deed setting up Waterlow Park for access to be free, so a charge would not be contrary to the Deed. If the fee was £5 per barbecue that would bring in something of the order of £100-250 on a weekend day, if it was £10 then it would bring in between £200 and £500.

A ticketed system would allow the numbers of barbecues to be controlled: a fixed maximum number of tickets would be issued per day. As some people have left by the time others come – some have lunchtime barbecues, others prefer a later event - it is not easy to know just how many people would be there at one time, unless the tickets were timed. But then it is a question of how long people stay. Some may stay two hours while other groups are there for the whole afternoon. But this could be reviewed. If the initial maximum number of tickets was set at 50 and it was found that resulted in either overcrowding or empty spaces, the number could easily be increased or reduced.

There would not be much expenditure in setting this system up, and if it did not work it could be quite easily abandoned. There would however be running costs, principally to pay for the staffing of ticket checking, which would not be fully met unless a more substantial charge was made for tickets.

The consensus view of the members of the Working Group is that this system would be difficult to operate in practice. Barbecuers might come in through any of the five entrances to the Park; some arrive and set up early so that the staff would be needed from late morning until about 7pm; people used to the arrangement without tickets would turn up expecting to be able to barbecue and some level of confrontation might be expected; it would be necessary to distinguish between barbecuers and other picnickers who also arrive with baggage, a distinction requiring examination of what people coming into the Park are carrying. It could be made to work but only at substantial expense and the ‘security checks’, as they would be seen, would change the atmosphere for visitors to the Park. And on the quieter days the ticketing would serve no purpose.

1. Ban charcoal barbecues and install electric barbecues

The feasibility of installing electric barbecues has been discussed above. A power cable would need to be laid, probably from Swain’s Lane, to the barbecues. The barbecues would be permanent fixed cuboids in silver-coloured metal, which could be sited on the existing tarmac area.

Their benefits over the current system have been set out and include: reduced air pollution, reduced

smells, control of the numbers of barbecues, less damage to the environment of the Park itself, and wider environmental benefits. Together these benefits are significant.

The principal disadvantages of electric barbecues are the installation cost and the change in the look of the Park. That second disadvantage is a subjective judgment on which people may differ. They would require permission from English Heritage. The taste of food barbecued on an electric barbecue might be less appealing.

If Camden were to ban barbecues in all its parks and open spaces except electric barbecues, then there would be an advantage to Waterlow Park and to the community of barbecuers if Camden made electric barbecues available in other Camden open spaces. It would reduce pressure on the facilities in Waterlow Park. This provides an opportunity to review Camden's policy and perhaps install electric barbecues elsewhere so giving people wider opportunities for such events involving families and friends. Some initial enforcement would probably be needed while people were getting used to the new arrangements.

#### 1. Ban all barbecues

Barbecues provide an opportunity for 'social cohesion'. Not only does that refer to the opportunity for family and friends to get together, but to the feelings that barbecuers have about what London, and particularly this part of London, provides for their enjoyment. Some members of the Working Group would be sad to see that lost.

Because all London boroughs except Camden have banned barbecues (though at least two have since set up electric barbecues), Waterlow Park is one of the few places in London that people without their own outside spaces can barbecue. It is a particularly attractive park and it comes top in online searches for places to barbecue in London. The other places now are only in Camden, and Lincoln's Inn Fields comes second. It is much smaller than Waterlow Park and less attractive. Removing the possibility of barbecuing in Waterlow Park or from all Camden's public spaces would effectively stop people without their own outside space from barbecuing in London, save for the recently introduced electric barbecues in Islington and Southwark.

Waterlow Park, and Camden open spaces more widely, are providing a facility for Londoners to barbecue which is currently available in very few other places. Camden may wish to consider Members developing a position which could be taken, through the GLA, London-wide. It may be that several other boroughs which have banned conventional barbecuing would be prepared to install electric barbecues.

A complete ban would prevent cultural events taking place, at least in their traditional form, at which barbecuing is usual, such as Sizdah Bedar and the beginning and end of Eid. On the other hand many people use the Park for picnicking, and those who currently barbecue could still use the Park for the other parts of their social activities. Some members of the Working Group consider that the problems caused by barbecues can only be solved by a complete ban.

## **Recommendations**

As was said above, the future of barbecues in Waterlow Park is something on which members of the Working Group hold a range of views. The following recommendations are therefore not able to be unanimous.

Waterlow Park is dedicated to 'the Recreation of the Public'. Barbecues are one form of that recreation so can be considered in principle an appropriate activity to take place in the Park. Charcoal barbecues cause air pollution and other environmental harms, and it would be consistent with

Camden's policy on air pollution to ban those barbecues from spaces over which it has control.

It is possible to continue to allow barbecuing without charcoal if electric barbecues are used. While there are financial and planning issues which need to be addressed, electric barbecues (Option 3) are the recommended option for the reasons set out above. They should, if possible, be installed in time for the 2025 barbecue season. If that does not turn out to be possible then the improvements listed under Option 1 above should be considered for the 2025 season, with electric barbecues in 2026.

Separately, and in any event

1. The toilets in the Park should be signposted.
2. Parking wardens should be employed to enforce the parking restrictions in Swain's Lane at weekends.
3. Separate arrangements should be made for major events, in particular Sizdah Behar, as set out at page 8 above.

18 September 2024