

Waterlow Park Barbecue Working Group

Supplementary Report 2025

Introduction

1. The Waterlow Park Barbecue Working Group ('BWG') was set up in 2024 to advise the Waterlow Park Trust Advisory Group ('TAG') on barbecues in Waterlow Park ('the Park'). It reported in September 2024. In March 2025 the use of the Park by barbecuers was even greater than in 2024, and the BWG was reconvened to gather information and make further recommendations if appropriate.
2. This report does not cover the ground of the previous report. For example there is no reconsideration of electric barbecues, nor do we review the detailed rules around barbecuing in the Park. The reader is referred to the previous report for a fuller consideration of those and other matters.
3. The BWG held meetings on 13.6.25 and 2.7.25. The membership of the BWG remained as before, although Rachel Kelly and Mehrdad Aref-Adib attended only the first meeting in 2024 and did not attend either of the 2025 meetings. Neither Mehrdad Aref-Adib nor Rachel Kelly responded to the invitations from the Chair to attend the 2025 meetings though Rachel Kelly did provide a note for the relevant Camden Committee. Gabi Howard decided that as she was a Camden officer she should not attend the second meeting which was to discuss, among other things, a deputation to a Council meeting. The effective BWG membership in 2025 was therefore:

Francis Wilkinson, Secretary, Highgate Society (Chair)

Ian Dungavell, Chief Executive, Highgate Cemetery

Gabi Howard, Park Services Manager, LB Camden (first meeting only)

Louise Lewis, local resident, Member of previous Working Party, Friend of Waterlow Park

Fiona Brown, Chair, Friends of Waterlow Park

Ian Henghes, Chair, Trust Advisory Group.

4. It is important to note that the composition of the smaller BWG both continues to represent the spectrum of views between the 'ban barbecues completely' end and the 'carry on much as we are' end, and includes all those who were active members of the Group in 2024.

Background

5. It remains the case that Camden is the only London Borough with a policy to permit charcoal barbecuing in its public spaces. We previously described Waterlow Park as ‘a victim of its own success’ as it is the most attractive outdoor space for barbecuing in London, and recommended by, for example, Time Out magazine as the best place in London for barbecuing. Those using charcoal barbecues in London without their own space to do so have had no legal alternative to using Camden spaces.
6. It was noted in the previous report that the Persian/Iranian New Year would fall midweek in 2025, so that smaller numbers might be expected than in 2024 when it fell at a Bank Holiday weekend. This did not turn out to be the case as not only were there large numbers on the Wednesday of the New Year (21 March), but there were also large numbers, estimated to be over 1,000, on the weekends preceding and following that date.
7. Such numbers cannot be contained in the designated areas for barbecuing in the Park and affect the use of the Park more widely by other Park users. Complaints were received by Camden, by the Friends of Waterlow Park, by TAG and by the Highgate Society of smoke, smells, amplified music (contrary to the Park’s rules), large groups (contrary to the Park’s limit of 20), parking obstruction (preventing access by a fire appliance), barbecuing outside the designated areas, barbecuing after the permitted hours, using disposable barbecues (contrary to the Park’s rules) and waste. A WhatsApp group was created which included hundreds of photographs showing the damage to the Park and the quantity and unpleasantness of the waste. A petition to ban barbecues was set up which was heard by Camden’s Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting on 14.7.25.¹
8. Following the degree of concern about the scale of barbecuing in March 2025, Camden imposed a temporary ban on barbecuing in the Park, which remains in place at the time of this report. Because of fire risks as a result of the dry summer weather this year, barbecuing is in any case currently banned in all Camden’s open spaces.
9. At its meeting on 14.7.25 Camden’s Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee adopted a recommendation which effectively means that, if

¹ At that meeting it was said by the petitioners that the terms of Waterlow Park’s 1995 charity registration excluded the use of barbecues. Having looked into that, we do not find there to be any such exclusion.

considered necessary, a report will be taken back to committee about barbecuing in the Park following this report being considered by TAG. Meanwhile Camden's policy position remains, since 2014, to permit charcoal barbecues in their open spaces.

The Barbecue Working Group's position

10. At its second meeting the BWG was able to reach a consensus position, which was submitted as a deputation to the Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting which was to receive the petition to ban barbecuing. We considered that it would be helpful for the BWG to be represented there, particularly to answer any questions members of the Committee might have. The deputation was:

The Waterlow Park Barbecue Working Group has considered the current position and has reached the following conclusions, which has majority but not unanimous support from the Working Group:

- for all the reasons on which we have previously reported, the over-use of Waterlow Park for barbecuing has become unsustainable, and is likely to become more problematic and less sustainable in the future, and just carrying on more or less as we are with small adjustments is no longer viable
- we have considered various other ways of managing charcoal barbecuing there but have concluded that none of them will work, and in particular that they are likely to increase confrontation and would change the experience of the Park for the worse for all users
- there are also reasons of principle against charcoal barbecuing (air quality and forest depletion)
- we have therefore concluded, with some reluctance for all the reasons we have previously expressed, that the ban on barbecuing in the Park should be made permanent
- this does not affect the use of the Park for picnicking without barbecues, its use for authorised special events, and our longer-term proposal for electric barbecues.

11. That meeting was not attended by Gabi Howard, as previously explained. Louise Lewis was unable to stay to the end. The above was the

unanimous view of those who attended the whole meeting, and it is relevant that included the Chairs of TAG, of the Friends of Waterlow Park and of the BWG. It is important, also, to recognise that this position was not the position at the start of the meeting of any of those who attended, and was a position which developed in the course of discussion. Those who did not attend the meeting did not have the opportunity to reconsider their positions in the light of the discussion. The above is therefore put forward as the BWG's position.

12. The BWG has been alert throughout to the variety of influences which affect the views of residents and others on barbecuing in the Park. The views of individual members are affected by the comparative weight they give to each of the Principles and Agreed Facts which are at annex A.
13. The BWG considers, see above, that special events could be authorised which might include charcoal barbecues if Camden does not ban them entirely from its open spaces. We recommend the following arrangements for authorised special events which might include barbecues, for example the Persian/Iranian New Year celebrations:
 - a. Liaison with organisers in order to make the requirements clear about the dates permitted, numbers, amplified music, disposable barbecues, times and areas for barbecues.
 - b. Sufficient security personnel to effectively enforce those requirements. With 1,000 people attending we consider that would mean 12 personnel.
 - c. Additional temporary toilets as well as better signage to the Park toilets.
 - d. Additional waste receptacles and refuse collection.
 - e. A traffic management plan including effective parking enforcement, in Swains Lane particularly and also on Highgate Hill. Because of a history of obstruction to emergency vehicles in Swain's Lane, vehicle removal should be available. As some of the people parking obstructively there have displayed disabled badges, repositioning of those obstructive vehicles will be likely to be more appropriate than removal.
 - f. Remediation of damage to the Park.

Even with all these arrangements in place it would be difficult to control the numbers attending the Persian/Iranian New Year celebrations, as there is no overall organiser.

Recommendations

14. We recommend that the ban on barbecues in Waterlow Park be made permanent (paras 10-11). If Camden does not ban charcoal barbecues in all its parks, then we make recommendations for how special events with barbecues would need to be managed in Waterlow Park (para 13). These recommendations should be considered and, if so decided, implemented before the 2026 barbecue season.

15. Last year we recommended that the permanent installation of electric barbecues coupled with a ban on charcoal barbecues would be an improvement on the current policy of permitting charcoal barbecues: it would manage the numbers; remove the charcoal smoke; be better for the environment; keep the barbecuing to designated areas. There is a cost implication. This is considered by Camden, who would be responsible for the installation of the electric barbecues, to be a longer-term possibility.

16. The recommendations made in our report last year for improved signage, particularly to the Park toilets, and for parking wardens to be employed in Swain's Lane at busy weekends whether or not there are barbecues, remain valid.

July 2025

Annex A

Principles and agreed facts

1. It is a good thing for people without their own outside spaces to be able to socialise outside, and Waterlow Park provides a good environment for them to do so. It follows that such socialising should be permitted unless there are reasons not to do so.
2. Such socialising can include barbecues, which some communities may consider traditional. Others in those same communities may not share that view.
3. Some people consider that barbecues spoil the Park for other people, and pollute the environment round the Park for residents and visitors, and that they should be banned.
4. Barbecues burn charcoal, which mainly comes from hardwoods which are not replaced. This causes environmental harm.
5. The burning of charcoal and the cooking of food on it cause air pollution. Camden's Air Quality Strategy requires charcoal burning in the Borough to be stopped as far as possible.
6. The air pollution caused is not only from particulates and carbon dioxide but also from smells.
7. There are two distinct issues for barbecues in Waterlow Park: the large events such as the Iranian/Persian new year in March (at the spring equinox on 20th/21st), and routine use of the Park by barbecuers during the summer season. We considered those issues separately in our previous report.
8. The Iranian New Year fell on a Wednesday this year, and there were large numbers of people in the Park on the previous and following weekends, as well as on the Wednesday.
9. Celebrations of the Iranian New Year this year generated many complaints: there was a WhatsApp group of over 100 opposing the barbecues and a petition to ban barbecues with some 1,400 signatures. The petition was presented to Camden's Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee on 14.7.25.
10. Complaints this year have included of smoke, smells, amplified music (contrary to the Park's rules), large crowds (contrary to the Park's rules), parking obstruction, barbecuing outside the designated areas, barbecuing continuing after the permitted hours and waste. We have had the opportunity to review the comments received by Camden, by TAG and by the Friends of Waterlow Park.
11. A ban on barbecues is not the same as banning socialising outside with food and drink. During the period of the barbecue ban this year hundreds of visitors have enjoyed picnics in the Park.
12. The rule that permission is required for groups over 20 is ignored by barbecuers, who may be ignorant of it, and it has not been enforced by Camden.