

CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 10 JULY 2023 AT 6.30 PM
COMMITTEE ROOM 2, TOWN HALL, JUDD STREET, LONDON WC1H 9JE

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SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

- | | Wards |
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| 5. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY) | |
| Objecting to the installation of gates on Primrose Hill Park – Amy McKeown representing Primrose Keepers (local community engagement group) | (Pages 3 - 4) |

SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA ENDS

Issued on: Friday 07 July 2023

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Agenda Item 5

I represent the Primrose Keepers, a local community engagement group who have met weekly since 2020 to find community solutions to the complaints stemming from the increase in park visitor numbers during the pandemic. We are inclusive, democratic, and welcome anyone from the local community, whatever their view on how to manage the park.

Despite the Royal Parks reporting a drop in visitor numbers to pre pandemic levels, they recently announced their intention to irrevocably upend London's relationship with one of its most loved and storied green spaces through the installation of gates to the park's entrances and restricted access. No decision to remove a public amenity of such social, historical and natural significance can be taken lightly, not least in the face of well reported and widespread local community opposition.

To begin, the lobbying for the park to be gated and locked has been led by a loud minority of neighbors to the park whose stated agenda is to see park access removed. Despite opposing groups being known to The Royal Parks through relationship building efforts and press coverage, none of these voices have been meaningfully included - indeed every action was taken to actively exclude them. I hope this changes today.

More concerning, those advocating for park closure push falsehoods and employ scare tactics. For example, in May 2023, the The Regents Park and Primrose Hill Safer Parks Panel met and crime was discussed. Shortly thereafter, our Ward representative Cllr Burrage— who was not present at the meeting – began informing local constituents that during the meeting it was reported that two rapes had occurred on the hill in the previous 6 months and cited this as a reason for supporting closing the park. We have spoken to a local detective police officer and meeting attendant who denied that the occurrence of two rapes in Primrose Hill Park in the last 6 months was discussed. We have found no other evidence or reports to support these claims (and have submitted the negligible park crime statistics). It is unacceptable for someone in a position of power to cite unverified information to scare monger and justify gates.

Some efforts were made to by The Royal Parks to support the decision with an 'Engagement Survey', but the initiative failed the fundamental minimum requirements of what a public consultation should look like and does not represent our diverse community's views. Furthermore, the Royal Parks refuse to answer if they were considering their engagement survey as a public consultation.

At the same time, the 'Engagement Survey' was fundamentally biased, both in its failure to ensure a wide and fairly weighted sample, but also in its framing of key questions. An online study devoid of demographic quotas / panel recruitment excludes a wide variety of harder to reach park users, while canvassing on the hill took place during daylight hours, thereby directly excluding those affected by the removal of late night and early morning access.

Though the Royal Parks states the survey accurately reflects the views of the local neighborhood, 62% of the survey respondents were homeowners, and ~76% of the respondents were white. In contrast, according to the 2021 census data, only ~30% of Camden residents are homeowners and only ~60% are white. And so, by their own admission, The Royal Parks has relied on a survey that does not represent the local community. More concerning is that this survey failed to engage the most underprivileged and under resourced segments of our local population. The failure to reach those who stood to lose the most is shocking and telling in equal manner.

The survey also presented with an inaccurate picture of the issues at stake - the survey wording 'led the witness' by presupposing an ASB problem in the park, without offering any evidence, and then presenting gates as the only solution, without offering any alternatives. Despite the survey's bias towards gates, the two most chosen answers were to never gate the park or only occasionally on specific holidays. Answers that were ignored alongside the crime statistics.

We now find ourselves with a decision that will cost money and resource, not just to install but to maintain, will likely cause knock on ASB, either from the displacement of groups en masse at

closing time (as has already been reported during the trial phase) or from members of the public jumping or destroying the gates (also witnessed during the trial period).

The fundamental issue has always been that the area needs more policing resourcing and more visible police patrols. Depriving access for the many for a marginal benefit to the few is not just wrong in general, it's also the wrong answer to the question of any ASB.

We request the Committee to make the following recommendations to the Full Council:

- Camden Council leads the creation and implementation of a community area management plan for the summer months when Primrose Hill and the surrounding areas will always become busy with visitors. This management plan would involve local stakeholders including The Royal Parks, all police forces, local business, and the community.
- This Community Management plan must be created using the recently published Safer Parks report and guidance commissioned by the Mayor of West Yorkshire, Tracy Brabin. This guidance includes making parks safe spaces (especially for women) through organising activities, use of lighting, and creating a sense of belonging. There are clear safety implications of having fewer eyes in the park and leaving it unpoliced overnight.

The Community Management plan must include:

- Increased, consistent and visible police patrols across Primrose Hill and in neighbouring areas. It is simply not acceptable to gate the park rather than adequately police the area. Cumbria Police recently showed that the presence of one officer regularly walking the beat reduced by just under half (47 per cent) its anti-social behaviour crimes (ASB). Visible regular patrols would negate the need to gate or close the park.
- Adequate public toilet facilities being available during the day and evenings provided by either Camden Council putting pressure on the Royal Parks to provide them, or themselves providing extra temporary toilets on surrounding streets (as the local council does in Shepherds Bush). Existing toilet provision is inadequate with the few toilets that are available being closed in the early evening. Human waste being found in the area is a driver of much anger and local complaints. It is unhygienic, unsanitary and potentially dangerous. It also has nothing to do with any need for the park to be gated.
- We also request that this committee recommends that Camden Council and it's planning committee refuse Planning Permission to the Royal Parks when they put in their application for gates. This refusal should be on the grounds that this would be a major, and unnecessary alteration to the community and area, akin to a major project or development such as building a multi-purpose block of flats. These cannot be done without a full, transparent public consultation place. Nothing close to this has taken place. Planning permission should be refused because both the gates aren't necessary, and no meaningful public consultation has taken place.

Access to the park promotes the health and wellbeing interests of those marginalized by poverty in Camden. For the sake of all who do not have access to their own garden, for those with shift work, personal or professional duties, or neurological disabilities that keep them from enjoying the park when it's busy, we invite you to work with the local community to create a robust and open area Community Management Plan and to request the full consultation previously promised by the Royal Parks.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12157497/Seaside-town-sees-incidents-drop-half-year-brining-one-lone-officer.html>