**Points to consider when writing to the press or your local politicians about the swimming charges**

KLPA members are encouraged to write to their GLA members and MPs, and also to local councillors if they live within the wards immediately surrounding Hampstead Heath.

The relevant local newspapers are the Camden New Journal and Ham & High. Both have covered this issue extensively and publish lively correspondence about it in their letters pages.

You may also wish to write to the Chair of the City of London’s Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen’s Park Committee, Anne.Fairweather@cityoflondon.gov.uk, and the Superintendent of Hampstead Heath, Bob.Warnock@cityoflondon.gov.uk.

Feel free to make use of the information below as guidance when writing to your elected representatives, the press or the City of London. Try to select some points which are most relevant to you and personalise with your own experience.

Greater detail can be found at <https://www.klpa.uk/consultation-with-the-city-of-london-on-charging-access-january-march-2020/>.

**Historical Background**

* Hampstead Heath has been protected by the Hampstead Heath Act since 1871, guarding it from enclosure and development.
* The Corporation of the City of London (CoL) took over management of Hampstead Heath in 1989, following demise in 1985 of the GLC. It received a £15m endowment to do so.
* Swimming at the ponds on the Heath has happened in an organised manner for over 100 years, and was entirely free of charge until 2005. In 2005 CoL first introduced charges (after failing to close down the Mixed Pond), although these were to be self-policed, from the City’s point of view these were compulsory. The fact that this has never been communicated effectively to swimmers is clear from the number of swimmers who had no idea that payment was not “voluntary”.
* According to the CoL, self-policed charges from 2005-2020 produced insufficient income to make the ponds “sustainable”. We argue that methods of collecting payment were highly inefficient and poorly publicised (see above).
* The swimming ponds are an invaluable resource for all Londoners, providing physical and mental health benefits and acting as a community lifeline for many. They include a women-only pond which is a unique safe space for women in the middle of an urban environment. Both single sex ponds provide a swimming place for faith communities where modesty is required.
* Swimmers on the Heath are represented by a variety of associations; the Highgate Men’s Pond Association, the Highgate Lifebuoys, the Kenwood Ladies’ Pond Association, the Mixed Pond Association and the Parliament Hill Lido Users’ Group.

**Swimming Review 2019**

* In late 2019 the CoL conducted a fundamental review of swimming “facilities” on the Heath, (ponds and Lido) following a significant increase in outdoor swimmer numbers over the last decade, the added impact of recent heatwaves on swimmer numbers and a death at the Highgate Men’s Pond earlier in the year.
* The Health & Safety Executive investigation after the fatality recommended a number of changes including need for at least 3 lifeguards to be on duty.
* That review was subsequently used in part as justification for enforced and increased charges for swimming at the ponds.

**Consultation on swimming charges January-March 2020**

* Consultation with swimmers’ associations in early 2020 is now believed to have been a sham, the outcome predetermined. This was unfinished business from 2005 for the CoL.
* No specific proposals were produced until 24 February 2020 and the committees which would decide which proposals to adopt, met on 9 and 11 March 2020. The latter stage of the consultation was therefore highly rushed.
* The Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee meeting on 9 March 2020 supported the option favoured by the swimmers’ associations, known as “Option 2”. This focused on encouraging a culture of payment, improving the payment options and not excluding those who could not pay. This committee is made up of local people who know the Heath well and care for it.
* The Hampstead Heath Management Committee (Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen’s Park Committee) is made up largely of City of London Members (equivalent to councillors) who are unaccountable to the people who live in areas around the Heath. On 11 March 2020 they rejected this recommendation and voted for “Option 3” which meant enforced charges, as well as increasing day prices to £4 full charge (100% increase) and £2.40 concession (140% increase). It is highly unusual for this committee to reject a recommendation from the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee.

**Lockdown and Re-opening March-July 2020**

* On 22 March 2020, shortly after the decisions on charging were made, the ponds and Lido were closed due to the Covid-19 lockdown. They remain closed as of 5 July 2020.
* From late May 2020 the swimmers’ associations entered discussions with the CoL about how the ponds and Lido might re-open in the Covid-19 recovery period. During those discussions it became apparent that enforced charging would be imposed at the ponds and booking would have to be done in advance and on-line.
* The swimmers’ associations understand the need for caution in the operating procedures at the ponds e.g. limiting numbers and not opening the changing rooms, but are alarmed by the imposition of charges at this stage.
* The mechanism proposed for booking to swim will exacerbate digital exclusion, and may disproportionately exclude older and disabled swimmers.
* The CoL stated in February 2020 that it would set up a “hardship fund” for swimmers who could not afford to pay. This has subsequently been renamed a ‘support fund’ to answer swimmers’ associations’ concerns about demeaning language, but it will not actually be in place for when the ponds re-open.
* The sale of season tickets increased significantly in early 2020, as part of encouraging a culture of payment, but has been suspended since 22 March 2020. Season tickets could not be used after 22 March 2020. The City has now, after three months, offered to refund or extend season tickets when the ponds re-open fully, but they will not be accepted as payment during the Covid-19 recovery period.
* The swimmers’ associations have made repeated requests to the CoL to suspend the new charging regime in the immediate aftermath of the Covid-19 lockdown, as an act of leadership and magnanimity. Members of the local community have experienced the mental and financial distress of the Coronavirus lockdown and the ponds will represent an even greater lifeline when they are re-opened. The associations have proposed a 2-year suspension to allow time to continue with encouraging a culture of payment based on improved payment mechanisms.
* Repeated requests have been made to the CoL for an updated Equalities Impact Assessment for the Covid-19 recovery period and this has not been provided. It is a legal requirement but does not appear to exist.