

Hampstead Heath Bathing Ponds and Lido Annual Review 2021/22

Introduction

There are three Lifeguarded natural Bathing Ponds at Hampstead Heath. The Kenwood Ladies' Bathing Pond and Highgate Men's Bathing Pond are open all year round, and the Mixed Bathing Pond is Lifeguarded during the Summer season.

The Parliament Hill Lido is a Lifeguarded outdoor un-heated chlorinated 60m swimming pool which also opens all year round.

This annual update sets out:

- A summary of the 2021/22 Swimming Season including the results of a survey
- Improvements in access and security planned at the bathing ponds
- Planning for the summer 2022 season

2021/22 Swimming Season

The 2021/2022 Swimming Season followed a year of disrupted swimming following closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The swimming facilities reopened to the public on 29 March 2021 and have remained open for the year.

Swimming season tickets were placed back on sale on the 11 March 2021 and were extremely popular in the lead-up to the facilities reopening. From 29 March to 30 April, there was no advance booking required at the Bathing Ponds and Lido. From 1 May, there was a mixture of free-flow where no advance booking was required and sessions which did require an advance booking. This operating model was devised following lessons learnt during the 2020/21 summer season including feedback from swimmers.

The result was a hybrid system where swimmers could swim in the early and later part of the day with no advance booking. Queuing was necessary if the Pond or Lido reached capacity. During the middle part of the day, swimmers booked in advance, either using Eventbrite or on a designated booking phone line, for either one hour sessions at the Ponds or three hour sessions at the Lido. This operational model prevented large queues building up outside the facilities, reduced incidents of anti-social behavior inside the facilities, and created a safer environment for swimmers and staff.

From 20 September 2021 - the start of the winter season - the Ponds and Lido returned to a free-flow system. This free flow system has been in place throughout the winter period and has continued into Spring 2022. It has worked very well due to the reduced number of swimmers at this time of year. However, on warmer days, particularly at the weekend, the facilities have become very busy with more cold water swimmers than previous years. This has led to Stewards operating a one in one out system to maintain maximum bather loads in the water.

The Hampstead Mixed Bathing Pond season was extended in 2021 until 31 October and reopened a month early on 2 April 2022. The Winter Swimming Club were very supportive of this initiative and were given access after the facility had closed to the general public.

Season Tickets

Season tickets have again proven to be extremely popular. The table below details the number and type of season tickets issued.

Season Ticket Type	12 Month	6 Month	1 Month	Total 2021/22	Total 2020/21
All Facilities - Adult	389	193	-	582	407
All Facilities - Concession	112	40	-	152	125
All Facilities - Free Early Morning Swim for U16's & 60+	546	77	-	623	472
All Facilities - Free Carer	25	-	-	25	6
Lido - Adult	174	134	170	478	283
Lido - Concession	38	32	54	124	86
Bathing Ponds - Adult	756	1,489	-	2,245	1307
Bathing Ponds - Concession	259	409	-	668	563

Season tickets issued 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022

Swimming participation

The following table shows the number of swims during the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

Facility	Number of swims
Lido	160,749
Bathing Ponds	335,005
Total	495,754 *

*Participation in 2020/21 was 160,172 across the 3 bathing ponds and Lido, but this was during the pandemic and lockdown restrictions.

Free swim sessions were made available to several groups, schools and play-schemes throughout the summer at the Lido. This included:

- 30 young refugees from DOST visited the Lido on 4 occasions.
- A local Somalian group were introduced by Heath Hands to the Lido-most swimming in an open-air pool for the first time.
- Talacre Playcentre who visited on four occasions.
- Brookfield and Gospel Oak primary school participated in a 2 week water safety awareness programme for years 5&6.
- NHS key workers, many from the BAME community, were given an introduction to open water coaching on Tuesday evenings.
- Mental Health Swim sessions at the Lido and Mixed Pond

Triathlon training started again on Tuesday evenings at the Lido from June 2021.

Summer Swimming Survey Results

In November 2021, swimmers were asked to participate in an online survey about their experiences of swimming during the summer months. The results of this survey have informed the operational model of the summer 2022 swimming season.

2,079 people responded to the survey which was distributed via email and advertised on social media from 5 November 2021.

The survey focused on the 2021 summer season and asked swimmers to rate the pre-booked session which had been used in summer 2021 and also to give their views on advance booking.

The booking system was rated as 4.01 out of 5 and there was a balance between positive and negative views on booking in advance. Positive comments included the ability to swim when desired and the lack of queuing. Swimmers also said the atmosphere inside the facility was much less crowded and more relaxed than a busy summers day before a booking system was introduced. The alternative view was that advance booking removed the ability to be spontaneous and that sessions sold out very quickly particularly when the weather was warm.

The survey also asked people to rate their experiences of the free-flow session, where no advance booking was required. Free flow sessions were rated 4.35 out of 5. Positive comments were focused on the swimmers ability to go along without any forward planning and that it was a return to how the

ponds had been before the Pandemic and a booking system was introduced. Negative comments centered on large queues and being turned away due to the pond being at capacity. Swimmers also noted that it was very busy in the facilities when the weather was warm during the free flow-sessions.

Following the survey, and in response to user feedback, we reduced the break between sessions to 15 mins at the Bathing Ponds and increased the free flow before and after the sessions. We also increased our maximum bather load at the Lido for each session to increase capacity.

Capital Project

Following the 2019 Swimming Review and advice from the Health and Safety Executive, funding was secured to implement safety, access and security works across the three Hampstead Heath Bathing Ponds.

Proposals include:

- Improving visibility from the lifeguard huts at Men's and Mixed Pond
- Addition of accessible changing, shower, WC and waterside hoist at the Men's and Mixed Pond and keeping the existing open plan changing room in the Men's Pond.
- Provision of accessible changing, shower and accessible WC within the existing accessible toilet space at the Ladies' Pond

From 1 April to 25 April, swimmers were asked to give their views on the initial proposals via an online survey.

Ladies' Pond Survey Results

- 1154 responses were received
- 887 (77%) were positive or happy with the proposals
- 105 (9%) were against linking the toilets and the changing rooms. This was due to hygiene and the fact that the changing room would potentially become very busy
- 82 (7%) did not have strong view either way.
- 25 (2%) were against making any changes – preferring the facility as it is.

Men's Pond Survey Results

- 495 responses were received
- 435 (87%) were positive about the proposals to make the pond more accessible.
- 24 (5%) were against making any changes- preferring the facility as it is.
- 11 (2%) stated they would like to reinstate the area for nude sunbathing.

- 8 (1.6%) had no strong opinion on the plans.

Taking account of the feedback and the overall focus on accessibility with a number of structural improvements, there are clear advantages on keeping the open plan changing area as a way to improve accessibility. This will have an impact on the area previously used for nudist sunbathing and this change will be subject to review that will be presented to committee at a later date.

Mixed Pond Survey Results

- 339 responses were received
- 310 (91%) were positive about the proposals to make the pond more accessible
- 25 (7%) said they would prefer no alterations to the changing facilities
- 13 (4%) were against making any changes – preferring the facilities to stay the same.
- 6 (2%) had no strong opinions on the plans.

Overall, survey feedback indicated strong support for the proposals.

Further engagement with the Swimming Associations took place on 5 May 2022 prior to submission of the planning application. Swimmers will also be included in discussions about the construction phase of the project which is expected to be in Winter 2022/23.

Health and Safety

Rescues

Number of rescues or first aid incidents carried out by lifeguards from April 2021 to March 2022.

Site	In water rescue	First aid	Other
Lido	26	22	
Men's pond	14	6*	
Mixed pond	21	4	
Ladies pond	14	20	2

* On 20 Aug 2021 a man was resuscitated at the Men's bathing pond by lifeguards on duty. The casualty had suffered a cardiac arrest and the defibrillator was used to restart his heart. This was on a busy day and the three lifeguards and steward were able to manage the emergency whilst making sure the other swimmers remained safe.

Staffing arrangements

Lifeguard numbers and maximum bather loads play an important role in keeping swimmers safe. At each bathing pond we continue to have a minimum of three lifeguards on duty at any one time during the summer

months from May to September. This allows for adequate breaks to be taken whilst maintaining suitable supervision of swimmers. The maximum bather load for each pond has been capped at 100 in the water and this is managed by the Stewards during free flow sessions. The Stewards are also controlling bather numbers during pre-book sessions.

Income and Expenditure

	Bathing Ponds	Parliament Hill Fields Lido	Totals
Employee Costs	758,649	720,651	1,479,299
Operational Expenditure	34,814	135,867	170,681
Total Expenditure	793,463	856,518	1,649,981
Income (Online booking fees and VAT have been deducted)	676,912	454,913	1,131,825
Funding allocated from the Heath's 2020/21 Local Risk Budget	116,551	401,605	518,156
% of Heath's 2021/22 Local Risk Budget			13.5%
% of Heath's 2020/21 Local risk budget			18.8%

Income and expenditure at the Bathing Ponds and Lido for the period of April 2021- March 2022.

Looking forward to the 2022 Summer Swimming Season

The 2022 summer season started on the 30 April 2022 when the Lido and three bathing ponds opening hours were extended. The Mixed Pond has already opened for public swimming a month earlier than previous years with the Winter Swimming Club given access once the lifeguards have locked up for the day. The extended season trial at the Mixed Pond will be reviewed and a decision made on whether there will be a continuation of this arrangement in 2022/23.

The Lido and Pond opening times for the 2022 summer swimming season are as follows:

Lido – Swimming sessions (30 April – 30 September 2022)

Session	Open
1 - Lane Swimming – capped free flow	07.00-10.00
2 - Open Swimming – pre-booking only	10.30-13.30
3 - Open Swimming – pre-booking only	14.30-17.30
4* - Lane Swimming – capped free flow, adults only	18.00-20.30**

Last entry for each session is 30 minutes before closing.
 Session 4* No session on Saturday, Sunday and Tuesday evenings.
 Session 4** Opening time from 12-30 September will be 18.00-19.30.

From 1 October the Lido will be open for capped free flow lane swimming only between 07.00-13.00 (last entry 12.30).

Session 1 – Lane Swimming

- Up to 250 swimmers will be permitted to use the Lido at any one time.
- Lane swimming only.

Sessions 2 and 3 – Open Swimming

- Family orientated swimming sessions.
- Up to 700 swimmers per Session. Session tickets must be pre-booked to guarantee entry.
- An adult can bring up to 2 children aged 4-7yrs. Under 4s must be accompanied by an adult on a 1:1 basis.
- Sauna closed.

Sessions 4 – Lane Swimming

- Up to 250 swimmers will be permitted to use the Lido at any one time.
- Adult lane swimming only.

Highgate Men's, Kenwood Ladies' and Hampstead Mixed Bathing Ponds

Time Changes	Open/vacate
Sunday 27 Mar – Saturday 9 Apr 2022*	07.00 - 16.30
Sunday 10 Apr – Saturday 30 Apr 2022	07.00 - 18.30
Sunday 1 May – Saturday 13 Aug 2022	07.00 - 20.30
Sunday 14 Aug – Monday 29 Aug 2022	07.00 - 20.00
Tuesday 30 Aug – Saturday 17 Sept 2022	07.00 - 19.00
Sunday 18 Sept – Saturday 15 Oct 2022	07.00 - 17.30
Sunday 16 Oct – Saturday 29 Oct 2022	07.30 - 16.30
Sunday 30 Oct – Saturday 27 Nov 2022*	07.00 - 14.15
Sunday 28 Nov 2022 – Saturday 4 Feb 2023	07.30 - 14.45
Sunday 5 Feb – 25 Mar 2023	07.00 - 14.15

*The Mixed pond will open on 2 April 2022 and close on 30 October 2022

Bathing Pond opening times June – August

Session	Open	Type
1	07.00-11.30	Capped Free Flow (no booking available)
2	12.00-13.00	pre-book only
3	13.15-14.15	pre-book only
4	14.30-15.30	pre-book only
5	15.45-16.45	pre-book only
6	17.00-20.30*	Capped Free Flow (no booking available)

Capped free flow sessions - last entry 30 mins before closing
Session 6* Opening time from 14 to 29 Aug 17.00-20.00 due to light

Sufficient time has been allocated between sessions to facilitate cleaning and preparation for the next session.

Conclusion

Significant progress has been made towards implementing the outcomes of the March 2020 Swimming Review, and this has been critical to maintaining safe access for swimming during a very challenging year. Over 495,000 swims have been facilitated across the Bathing Ponds and Lido and 4,897 season tickets issued.

We have increased lifeguard numbers during the summer months to allow staff to take adequate breaks away from the water and during winter months the introduction of a roving lifeguard who travels between sites.

Stewards have played an important role at the Bathing Ponds, providing information to customers and working in tandem with the lifeguards who need to be focused on supervising swimmers in the water.

The Lifeguards have felt confident in being able to support swimmers accessing the Bathing Ponds and Lido in a safe and welcoming environment. This has positively impacted on their morale and wellbeing. Continuous review of the operating arrangements remains critical for the sustainability of the Bathing Ponds and Lido.