

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park	Dated: 4 February 2025
Subject: Hampstead Heath Fees and Charges FY'2025-26 (1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026)	Public report For Decision
This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes• provides business enabling functions	-Diverse engaged communities -Leading sustainable environment -Vibrant thriving destination -Providing excellent services -Flourishing public spaces
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of:	Katie Stewart, Executive Director Environment
Report author:	Bill LoSasso, Superintendent, North London Open Spaces

Summary

This report proposes a procedure to guide the annual review of fees and charges on Hampstead Heath and proposes fees and charges for financial year 2025-26 (1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026).

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Approve the update to the existing fees and charges for financial year 2025-26 (1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026) as proposed herein.

Main Report

Background

1. North London Open Spaces (NLOS) charges for a wide range of services and recreation and sporting activities provided across the four public open spaces that it oversees (Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, Queen's Park, and West Ham Park). These fees and charges are reviewed annually to ensure that fees and charges remain relevant and appropriate.
2. The income generated from fees and charges contributes towards the cost of managing and maintaining Hampstead Heath and to providing sports and recreational facilities across Heath. Sports fees and charges are not currently based on full cost recovery and continue to be subsidised by the Charity to promote participation in formal and informal recreation, and to support health and wellbeing for Heath visitors.

Procedure for Reviewing Fees and Charges

3. In addition to proposing fees and charges for financial year 2025-26, the Superintendent also proposes to document a procedure to guide NLOS's annual review of fees and charges that ensures consistency and transparency, as outlined below.
4. Officers will review the fees and charges at Hampstead Heath on an annual basis, with any changes to be implemented at the beginning of each financial year (1 April). Any further proposed amendments to fees and charges would be brought to committee during the year if and as needed.
5. Unless circumstances warrant otherwise, Officers will submit proposed fees and charges for the forthcoming financial year to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Committee for approval at that Committee's final scheduled meeting of the financial year (4 February 2025 for financial year 2024-25).
6. Officers will consult on the proposed fees and charges with the bodies below prior to submission to the Committee:
 - a. Hampstead Heath Sports & Wellbeing Forum
 - b. Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee.
7. Any approved changes to fees and charges will be implemented to take effect at the start of the forthcoming financial year on 1 April. Relevant updates to

booking systems, websites, signage, and other places where fees and charges are communicated will also occur by 1 April.

Inflation

8. The rate of inflation in the preceding year regularly informs decisions on fees and charges. To ensure consistency, and in alignment with past practice, Officers will use the 12-month Retail Price Index (RPI) as reported by the Office of National Statistics to measure the rate of inflation.¹ To further ensure consistency of analysis, Officers propose to use the September 12-month rate each year in their review of fees and charges.
9. Although any changes to fees and charges would not occur until 1 April, it is necessary to use the September rate because this allows Officers sufficient time to: 1) complete fees and charges analyses, 2) develop recommendations on any proposed changes for the forthcoming financial year, and 3) consult with the bodies noted in paragraph 6, which often meet several months in advance of this committee, and 4) ensure these processes are completed before this committee meets, which is also often months prior to the beginning of the financial year on 1 April. Officers also believe that it will allow sufficient time for the Office of National Statistics to public the September inflation rate following the conclusion of the month, which is often delayed by approximately one month.

Review of Fees and Charges

10. In reviewing the fees and charges and in developing a recommendation for the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Committee, factors that Officers will consider include:
 - a. Inflation: The 12-month RPI rate of inflation as measured in September of the current year.
 - b. Financial position: The past, present, and future-projected financial position of the charity.
 - c. Benchmarks: Where available, benchmarked local rates for similar fees, charges, and services.
 - d. Service and charity needs: The specific needs of the charity and Hampstead Heath, including the need for investments, repairs, new and existing services and programmes, and staffing needs.
 - e. Representations of the bodies that are consulted as noted in paragraph 6.
 - f. Other relevant factors as reported to this Committee.

Rounding

¹ [RPI All Items: Percentage change over 12 months: Jan 1987=100 - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk/rpi)

11. For administrative ease, the following rounding conventions will be observed when proposing fees and charges for adoption by the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Committee:
- a. Under £50: rounded to the nearest £0.10.
 - b. Between £50 and £100: rounded to the nearest £0.50.
 - c. Over £100: rounded to the nearest £1.00.

Benchmarking

12. In recent years, Officers have performed benchmarking to similar local providers where it has been possible. This helps ensure that fees and charges remain relevant and appropriate to local communities. This practice will continue.

Annual recommendations for committee

13. In communicating a recommendation to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Committee, Officers will:
- a. Present the relevant fees and charges for the current fiscal year.
 - b. Present the proposed fees and charges for the forthcoming fiscal year, both before and after rounding as noted in paragraph 11.
 - c. Include a concise narrative of the underlying reasoning for the proposed fees and charges and note exceptions or items for specific consideration where applicable.
14. Officer recommendations on fees and charges will be for one fiscal year (1 April to 31 March) and will take effect on 1 April annually.

Proposed Fees and Charges for Financial Year 2025-26 (1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026)

15. Officers have given considerable thought to the fees and charges on Hampstead Heath. While raising additional revenue remains an important and necessary objective of the charity, Officers also seek to ensure that the Charity continues to promote access to and the benefits of open spaces, the natural environment, and recreation.
16. Accordingly, Officers propose to increase the majority of fees and charges only in line with the September 2024 RPI 12-month inflation rate of 2.7%, except for limited exceptions as noted in Appendix 1. This helps ensure that the charity is taking appropriate measures given the impact of inflation on the charity's expenses.

17. For reference, in 2023-24 an increase of 5% was adopted by the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Committee (the rate of inflation was 9.2%). In 2024-25, an increase of 5% was again adopted by the Committee (the rate of inflation was broadly the same).
18. Officers have again undertaken benchmarking to ensure charges remain in line with local providers (Appendix 2).
19. The proposed fees and charges continue to include concessionary rates, which offer a 40% discount on the standard adult charge, as indicated in Appendix 1. Officers believe that this concessionary rate is competitive and helps to further the Charity's objective to promote participation in formal and informal recreation and support health and wellbeing for Heath visitors.

Car parking

20. Following local benchmarking, and in alignment with environmental goals, Officers propose to increase car parking charges in financial year 2025-26 in alignment with inflation. Free parking will continue to be provided at all car parks for Blue Badge holders.
21. In addition, car parking charges are currently incurred in two-hour minimum increments for the first four hours of parking (i.e., the first charging increment is 0-2 hours, and the second charging increment is 2-4 hours). Charges then occur in one-hour increments thereafter.
22. In March 2024, Officers were granted authorisation by the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Committee to amend this charging framework, if sought, to shorten the minimum charging period and apply the existing charging framework pro rata. Officers now plan to implement that change.
23. Such a change will allow more flexibility for visitors, and in some cases would minimise unintended effects where visitors are paying more for parking than the recreational service they visit the Heath to use. For example, under the current car parking charging framework, a visitor must pay a minimum of £6.50 to park for the two-hour period even if they are visiting the Heath for a swim that costs £4.70 (an effective cost of £11.20 for swim at the Lido). The same is true if the visitor is visiting the Heath for a running session at the athletics track that costs £5.30 (an effective cost of £11.80 for one run at the track).
24. While the car parking charging framework is intended to, among other things, encourage and incentivise more sustainable forms of transit to and from the Heath and generate much-needed income for the charity to support its management and maintenance of the Heath, Officers believe that this updated approach will permit more flexibility among Heath users and support the Charity in achieving its objectives as outlined in the Hampstead Heath

Management Strategy. Officers will continue to monitor car parking use to understand the impact of this change.

25. This change will be implemented as soon as possible under the currently effective charging rates, and the rates will be updated on 1 April 2025 with all other fees and charges.

Memorial benches

26. Memorial benches have been available for purchase/sponsorship on Hampstead Heath for many years. In summary, the scheme allows individuals to fund the cost of a new bench, which covers the cost of purchase, installation, memorial inscription, and ten years of maintenance by Officers.
27. This programme has had a long waiting list for many years and as a result has effectively been paused as a result. The programme has also not been reviewed in some time due to the impact of staff turnover, staffing shortages, and the pandemic. In 2025, officers will review the existing memorial bench programme at Hampstead Heath - reviewing current bench sponsors, available records and waiting lists, and benchmarking costs at other open spaces. Offices will also review locations for placement of benches on the Heath and update existing data related to the assets within the existing memorial bench programme. Officers will submit a report on this exercise once completed.
28. In the intervening time before the review is completed and a report is prepared, Officers propose to increase the cost of existing memorial benches and plaques by the rate of inflation should a space on the waiting list become available.

Consultation

Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee

29. The Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee was consulted on the proposed fees and charges at its meeting on 14 January 2025, and the Consultative Committee expressed support for Officers' proposals. A Member representing sport noted support for the expanded level of benchmarking that occurred and noted that it will be helpful in the future to further note how the benchmarking was undertaken and applied.

Hampstead Heath Sports & Wellbeing Forum

30. The Hampstead Heath Sports & Wellbeing Forum was consulted on the fees related on the proposed fees and charges via email in January 2025. Their representations are note below, with Officers responses.
31. A typographical error on the name of tennis charges was identified. Officers corrected the error.
32. The Parliament Hill Lido User Group expressed support for the proposed amendment to the car parking charging framework and support for the amendment to the cost for a sauna session. They also requested continued dialogue on aligning the car parking hours of operation with local parking restrictions. Officers will examine this in 2025, but do not propose any changes at this time, and note that operating hours must align with officer working hours and facility operating times.
33. The Kenwood Ladies Pond Association and Mixed Pond Association noted that while they do not dispute Officers' proposed inflationary increase for swimming at the ponds, they do not accept in principle the City Corporation's mandatory charging policy for pond swimming. The full representation is attached as Appendix 3.
34. Officers have not been able to validate the basis of the calculation of pond swimming income in July 2023 stated in the representation. Officers have also clarified that Hampstead Heath Charity provides annual financial reports to the Charity Commission, and clarified that financial information can be provided to external stakeholders where appropriate.
35. Officers respectfully make the following recommendations in response to the specific requests in the representation:
- a. Request: Extend the age limit from 16 to 18 for free swim, and extend the morning free swim from its current time of 9.30am.
 - i. Officers do not recommend this be adopted. The existing policy was agreed to encourage 8-15-year-olds to swim early mornings with their adult family members. Young swimmers aged 16-18, however, do not need to be accompanied by an adult at the ponds. These swimmers can, however, swim at the concessionary rate if they meet the required criteria for the rate.
 - b. Request: Increase the concession rate from 40% to 50%

- i. Officers do not recommend this be adopted. Officers believe that the current concession rate is appropriate and very competitive relative to other providers.
- c. Request: Allow for a monthly payment option to pay for the 12-month seasonal swimming pass, payable monthly as one twelfth (1/12th) of the discounted annual seasonal rate, as opposed to the current up-front payment. This payment would be in lieu of the established monthly rate that is already available to swimmers who do not purchase the seasonal pass
 - i. Officers do not recommend this be adopted. The purpose of an annual membership at a reduced fee is to minimize the administrative burden of repeat transactions, and the proposal would frustrate this objective and also further decrease a competitive annual fee.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications

- 36. The proposed fees and charges directly support the Hampstead Heath Management Strategy 2018-2028. This also contributes towards the achievement of the three strategic outcomes outlined in the City of London Corporate Plan 2024-29 and the four Natural Environment Strategies (2024-29).

Financial implications

- 37. The City's Financial Regulations require all Departments to recover full costs when setting charges to persons or external organisations or submit reasons to the appropriate service Committee when that objective is not met. It is therefore at the discretion of individual spending Committees to determine the actual level of fees and charges relative to the services they provide, after taking into account local considerations and priorities.

Resource implications

- 38. Officers are currently operating in an environment of significant resource constraint. Fees and charges are a critical means for Hampstead Heath Charity to retain and generate resources needed to deliver services and manage Hampstead Heath.

Legal implications

- 39. Hampstead Heath (Charity No. 803392) is a registered charity and the City of London Corporation is the corporate trustee. Members are reminded that any

decision they take in respect of the Charity must be in the best interests of that Charity. The City of London Corporation has statutory powers to charge for a wide range of facilities and services.

Risk implications

40. Risks are recorded in the Hampstead Heath Risk Register.

Equalities implications

41. A Test of Relevance has been completed in relation to the proposed fees and charges in the past. A full Equality Analysis is not recommended.

Climate implications

42. No implications.

Security implications

43. No implications.

Conclusion

44. Hampstead Heath continues to provide excellent value for money sports and recreational opportunities. The income generated through fees and charges contributes towards the cost of providing services and sports and recreational facilities, and to the significant cost of maintaining Hampstead Heath.

45. It is proposed that the majority of charges are increased by 2.7%, or increased otherwise as set out in Appendix 1, as noted herein.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Proposed Fees and Charges (FY'2025-26)
- Appendix 2: Fees and Charges Benchmarking (FY'2025-26)

Background Papers

None

Author

Bill LoSasso

Assistant Director (Superintendent)

North London Open Spaces

Environment Department (Natural Environment Division)

bill.losasso@cityoflondon.gov.uk