

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Committee	Dated: 4 February 2025
Subject: Highgate Wood 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 Highgate Wood 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 Highgate Wood and to providing sports and recreational facilities across Highgate Wood. 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 Highgate Wood 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 Highgate Wood 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. Highgate Wood Consultative Group
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 Officer 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 Highgate Wood, 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 in Highgate Wood. 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 Highgate Wood visitors.

Memorial benches

20. Memorial plaques for benches have been available for purchase/sponsorship in Highgate Wood for many years. In summary, the scheme allows individuals to fund the cost of a plaque for installation onto a bench, which covers the cost of purchase, installation, memorial inscription for the plaque.
21. 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 Highgate Wood - 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 in Highgate Wood and update existing data related to the assets within the existing memorial bench programme. Officers will submit a report on this exercise once completed.
22. In the intervening time before the review is completed and a report is prepared, Officers propose to increase the cost of existing memorial plaques by the rate of inflation should a space on the waiting list become available.

Consultation

23. The Highgate Wood Consultative Group was consulted on Officers' proposals for Highgate Wood via email in January 2025. Officers received one response during the consultation period, noted below.

24. The representative from the Highgate Society noted general support for Officers' proposal, and sought clarifications on the following, which Officers provided:
- a. Whether forest school charges are high enough given their impact to Highgate Wood. Officers noted that the fee is benchmarked, the total number of licensed forest school has remained constant in recent years, that participation in one forest school has decreased, and that the permitted location of forest schools is rotated to mitigate impact.
 - b. Whether uncharged walks in Highgate Wood by volunteers should be charged similar to Officer-led group walks. Officers noted that while Officer-led walks are only charged to nominally recover costs, we do not charge for uncharged, externally provided group walks, but do welcome voluntary donations to Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Kilburn Charity if participants are so inclined.
 - c. The fee for commercial filming was noted to be perceived to be too low relative to community filming. Officers clarified that the stated fee was only the application fee, which covers Officer costs in reviewing applications, and not the actual filming fees. Officers clarified further that commercial film shoots are charged at a competitive rate, benchmarked and discussed with the Film Liaison Office where appropriate, and are only permitted when appropriate for Highgate Wood.
 - d. Whether fees charged for activities in Highgate Wood are earmarked for Highgate Wood, which Officers confirmed to be accurate.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications

25. The proposed fees and charges directly support the Highgate Wood Management Plan 2025 – 2035. This also contributes towards the achievement of the three strategic outcomes outlines in the City of London Corporate Plan 2024-29 and the four Natural Environment Strategies (2024-29).

Financial implications

26. 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

27. Officers are currently operating in an environment of significant resource constraint. Fees and charges are a critical means for Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Kilburn Charity to retain and generate resources needed to deliver services and manage Highgate Wood.

Legal implications

28. Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Kilburn Charity 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

29. Risks are recorded in the Highgate Wood Risk Register.

Equalities implications

30. 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

31. No implications.

Security implications

32. No implications.

Conclusion

33. Highgate Wood 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 Highgate Wood.

34. 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

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