

Consultation Responses – Open Spaces Events Policy

1. Tooting Common Management Advisory Committee.

The TC MAC welcomes the approach outlined in this policy. Aware of the changes and potential changes ahead with the introduction of the Staff Mutual we are keen to see a policy agreed that is compatible with the character and ambience of Tooting Commons. The TC MAC sees this as particularly important in the light of experience provided by neighbouring Clapham Common where major events in recent years, albeit providing revenue, have proved extremely unpopular with local residents, the Friends Group and other users. The TC MAC welcomes the fact that the Events team share these concerns. However, the TC MAC is mindful of the fact that this policy will establish parameters and precedent that may go beyond the life of the current team.

The Events Policy that has been proposed would become the Council's Policy which would be implemented and managed by the Mutual or any subsequent provider of services. Once adopted, any future variations to the policy would need to be consulted upon and agreed by the Council's Executive.

Notwithstanding this, should the Mutual be approved, but later be unsuccessful in its bid to continue to manage its contract with the Council, then the staff that are employed by the Mutual (Parks, Events Team etc.) would be subject to TUPE transfer arrangements and as such, the knowledge and experience of the existing staff should not be lost.

Our principle concern is that, at some future date, the pressure and incentives to increase revenue from the commons outweighs the shared aim to manage, conserve and enhance them along the lines of their long-established character and use. Taking a long-term view we feel it is necessary to consider and protect the commons from a scenario where the management has been tendered to a commercial organisation that does not share the local commitment and pride in this very special environment.

As per comments provided above. The introduction of an Events Policy is designed to address this concern.

Obviously much of the protection for the commons is provided by the "Terms and Conditions" but we feel the Policy document will have to go further in incorporating the existing Event team's judgement and experience. The TC MAC would like, therefore, to make the following recommendations:

Safeguards: *the policy needs to be developed from the perspective of, "beyond the Staff Mutual". i.e. beyond the current personnel, knowledge, commitment and experience – and indeed, tacit policy. We feel more of the current team's understanding and experience needs to be incorporated to provide safeguards as well as guidance. None of us are here forever, hopefully the Commons will be.*

As above and in addition, the Events Policy that has been proposed is based on (but

slightly different to) the existing policy for Events in Battersea Park, which has been in existence, tried and tested since 2003. Furthermore, there are also processes for consulting with the Parks Service and relevant groups.

This said, all policies should be treated as 'live documents' and as such, there is no reason why the Events Policy as currently proposed cannot be developed over time and in liaison with stakeholders.

Protection of ecological areas: *with this in mind we feel protection of ecological areas should be explicit but not specific so that improvements and increases to ecologically sensitive areas remain protected in the long term.*

The Events Policy would not prevent any increases to ecologically sensitive areas, rather, it protects all and any sites of specific ecological importance whether in existence now or at some time in the future.

Definitions/guidelines: *what constitutes an event (particularly at the low end level)? In this respect we are mindful that "organized" local community use is not too readily classified (and charged) as an event.*

All events whether large or small are treated on their own merits. In general terms, events that are managed through the Events Team and to which the Events Policy applies, relate to events that require:

Event infrastructure (e.g. fencing, barriers, stages, marquees etc.);
Have a commercial element to them; or
Involve licensable activities (e.g. sale of alcohol, live music etc.).

General parameters for community events that would not attract a charge were first conceived during the recent Jubilee celebrations and are as follows:

No alcohol sales.
No food sales.
No live or recorded music.
No barbeques.
No glass.
No temporary structures, gazebos etc.
No temporary power supplies (i.e. extension cables or generators).
No temporary water supplies.
No events in playgrounds unless approved separately by Play Services.
All litter cleared afterwards including bunting etc.
All damage reported.
All relevant bye-laws, dog control orders and park regulations apply.
Proof of Public Liability Insurance to be provided.
Should not be of a scale to compromise general use by the public.

Assessment criteria: *in the judgment of permissions and charges we would like to see some weighting given to local community relevance and benefit.*

As above, all events whether large or small are treated on their own merits.

Checks and balances: *we recognize that the Staff Mutual is keen to keep the parks and events teams together. We support this but, again, feel the policy needs to incorporate*

some of the current knowledge, awareness and experience that allows them to make judgment calls sympathetic to the special character of Tooting Commons.

As above and it should also be noted that the policy and process includes an ongoing dialogue between the Events Team and the Parks Service, that provides additional checks and balances.

Limits on size, type and frequency: *The levels of events across the past 3 years give a good benchmark of what should be expected for the long term. With respect of C category events, we note that the Olympic torch parade was an “exceptional” event and recommend that category C events are always “exceptional”. The danger we see in setting a limit for this category (e.g. not more than 2 consecutive weekends) is that limits can become standards.*

The level of applications for Category C events is not anticipated to be high, as evidenced by current demand. It is also proposed that there will be no more than four category C events in/on the same park, common or open space in any six-month period.

With respect to “Type”, we recommend that events that do not have some specific relevance to the local communities are not allowed and that no event is allowed if it is incompatible in any way with the special character and ambience of the commons.

The communities that are local to the commons are extremely diverse and as such, relevance to one part of the community may not be the same as for others. It is considered that the policy as proposed (with the associated consultation processes) provides a reasonable basis upon which to proceed.

Designated areas: *designated areas should be (probably have been) identified for each category (but see recommendation 2 above).*

The siting of events is dependent on a number of factors, and clearly not every area of the commons is suitable for all, or indeed any, events. The policy is deliberately non-prescriptive as each event would be considered on its own merits and requirements.

Terms and conditions: *as the policy is developed it would be valuable to revisit the “Terms and Conditions” to ensure that both are complementary and mutually reinforcing.*

The Terms & Conditions are already kept under constant review in order to take account of changes to circumstances and legislation.

Consultation: *the policy should be developed in consultation with TC MAC and it should be conditional on future management bodies that it cannot be changed without consultation and agreement with the TC MAC.*

This is already intended.

Marketing: *Tooting Commons should not be marketed as event venues, i.e. seek events to provide revenue.*

This is the case.

2. Friends of Tooting Common.

The Friends of Tooting Common agree that there is a need for an Events Policy, as we believe the exploitation of open spaces in London for a commercial return needs to be controlled for the benefit of local residents and wildlife, and to keep intact the essential character and ambience of our green spaces. Specifically, it is important that the distinctive character of the Tooting Commons, with their higher levels of wildlife and wilder areas than many other London parks and commons, be maintained and enhanced. And it is important that the policy ensures this for the longer term, subsequent to the time of "staff mutual", when management of the commons might be handled by a commercial organisation.

The Events Policy that has been proposed would become the Council's Policy which would be implemented and managed by the Mutual or any subsequent provider of services. Once adopted, any future variations to the policy would need to be consulted upon and agreed by the Council's Executive.

Notwithstanding this, should the Mutual be approved, but later be unsuccessful in its bid to continue to manage its contract with the Council, then the staff that are employed by the Mutual (Parks, Events Team etc.) would be subject to TUPE transfer arrangements and as such, the knowledge and experience of the existing staff should not be lost.

One of our primary concerns about events on the commons is best illustrated by the example of Clapham Common. The major events which have been hosted on Clapham Common in recent years have had a detrimental effect on the common and users. For example, a recent music festival damaged Clapham Common to the extent that reinstatement work to the grass will cost £35,000.

Large areas of that Common are inaccessible to commons users for much of the summer, as they are fenced off for the events. The noise and light pollution is significant as well. These major events have been very unpopular with local residents, and we certainly do not want to see similar events happen on the Tooting Commons.

So we are very keen to see that there are clear, agreed-upon, sustainable, enforced rules for events on green spaces in Wandsworth, to ensure that the distinctive character of the Tooting Commons is maintained and enhanced.

The rationale behind the Events Policy is to put in place restrictions, limitations and processes relating to events where none currently exist, in order to establish a proper balance and maintain the character of the commons. In line with this, the very largest event that could take place would have a maximum audience number considerably lower than what is permitted on Clapham Common.

We think the draft Policy needs to be developed somewhat, to indicate more specifically how this will be achieved, including the type and frequency of events that will be allowed, and the considerations that will underlie the decisions to be made on applications for events. We agree with the Tooting Commons MAC that this could

probably be done by incorporating some of the current events team's understanding and experience, and judgement in deciding applications, into the policy. We also agree with the MAC that local community relevance and benefit should have some weighting in the criteria for deciding to allow an event, and that an event which does not have some specific relevance to local communities, or is inconsistent with the distinctive character of the Tooting Commons, should not be allowed.

As per comments provided above.

We also agree with Tooting Commons MAC that Tooting Commons should not be marketed as an event venue.

As per comments provided above.

On size and frequency of events: we recognise the danger (to which the MAC have referred) that a limit can become a standard. However we think it would be appropriate, particularly with a view to the longer-term, for the Policy to say:

- *that a category C event should always be regarded as "exceptional";*
- *but that in any case there should not be a category C or B event (at any site on the Tooting Commons) on consecutive weekends (we think this would damage the ambience of the Commons);*
- *that in any case there should not be more than (say) 4 category C events (at any site on the Tooting Commons) in any 6 month period; and*
- *that in any case there should not be more than (say) 6 category B events (at any site on the Tooting Commons) in any 6 month period.*

These suggestions regarding the frequency of events are accepted and the wording of the proposed Events Policy has been amended to reflect this.

We understand from the meeting on 14 August that the definition of an event which the Policy would work to is that it involves use of the Commons' infrastructure, and/or has a commercial aim. This seems a generally appropriate definition. We think it would be useful for the Policy to make this definition more explicit. Uses of the Commons which did not involve infrastructure or have a commercial aim would not be "events", and so not require an application. (In passing we would note that the majority of FOTC activities – for example our botanical and bat walks – would fall "below" this definition and so not be an event).

All events whether large or small are treated on their own merits. In general terms, events that are managed through the Events Team and to which the Events Policy applies, relate to events that require:

Event infrastructure (e.g. fencing, barriers, stages, marquees etc.);
Have a commercial element to them; or
Involve licensable activities (e.g. sale of alcohol, live music etc.).

General parameters for community events that would not attract a charge were first conceived during the recent Jubilee celebrations and are as follows:

No alcohol sales.
No food sales.
No live or recorded music.
No barbeques.
No glass.
No temporary structures, gazebos etc.
No temporary power supplies (i.e. extension cables or generators).
No temporary water supplies.
No events in playgrounds unless approved separately by Play Services.
All litter cleared afterwards including bunting etc.
All damage reported.
All relevant bye-laws, dog control orders and park regulations apply.
Proof of Public Liability Insurance to be provided.
Should not be of a scale to compromise general use by the public

We are however aware that there are many local groups who use the Commons for small or fairly small "events" which possibly involve a small usage of the Commons' infrastructure, but the group concerned do not have the resources to pay significant amounts to the Council for charges. As examples, the Commons are frequently used by local residents for informal sports and social events, including after-school picnics, or by not-for-profit groups organising sports for children (indeed, they in many cases either charge attendees nothing or a nominal amount; they are certainly not doing this to make a commercial return). There is a risk that by charges that are too high, and a policy that is too prescriptive, these groups will simply choose not to register their events with the Events Service.

As per comments provided above.

Similarly, and related to this, the FOTC (with our Dog Show) and other local groups run activities that may involve some use of the Commons' infrastructure, and raise some funds, but these funds are all put back into the Commons.

We think it might be helpful, from a public policy perspective, to define a separate category of "event", that though it involves some use of the Commons' infrastructure, is small and/or non-commercial. For such an event, there would either be a reduced charge (ie not the full rate applying to commercial events), or (where any funds raised are put back into the Commons, such as the FOTC Dog Show) the charge is waived by WBC.

As per comments provided above.

Finally, there are a couple of other points which we think would also usefully be clarified in developing the Policy further:

Given the comment in 11d) about Ecological Sites, it would be useful to clarify which parts of Tooting Commons would currently fit this criteria (and so be out of bounds to events) - although we recognise that the Commons may change over time.

The siting of events is dependent on a number of factors, and clearly not every area of

the commons is suitable for all, or indeed any, events. The policy is deliberately non-prescriptive as each event would be considered on its own merits and requirements, suffice to say that as per the policy no events shall be sited on any areas of specific ecological importance.

It might also be useful to clarify why there is a separate policy for Battersea Park, separate from the other green spaces.

The Events Policy for Battersea Park formed the basis for the Open Spaces Events Policy. It is separate due to the very different nature of the park compared with the other open spaces in the Borough, its infrastructure and layout and the fact that it has an established events programme.

3. Wandsworth Common Management Advisory Committee.

Wandsworth Common is a highly valued natural open space and its many different parts make it inappropriate for large events. The opinion of the Wandsworth Common MAC is that the only events that should be considered are small-scale community based events such as the Bellevue Rd Fair dog-show and the Westside carol singing, thus falling into the lower end of Category A in the scale laid down in Paper 14-365. The MAC believes that events of Category B (2500-5000 people) and Category C (5000-10,000) are unsuitable for the Common. The paper states that the current level of applications for all open spaces is 15 per year of which 14 are Category A. The inference is that only a minor proportion of those applications apply to Wandsworth Common. Accordingly, the MAC believes it is reasonable to ask that any event the Council considers suitable for Wandsworth Common should be presented to the MAC for consultation prior to it being given final approval. This consultation via an agreed point of contact(s) could be done quite rapidly and would not impose an unacceptable delay.

The siting of events is dependent on a number of factors, and clearly not every area of the common is suitable for all, or indeed any, events. Each event would be considered on its own merits and the policy as proposed includes a requirement to consult with the MAC on any Category B or C events.

The MAC should also be given the updated events diary at MAC meetings along with the Parks Report. This would surely appeal to the Events Team because if there were subsequent complaints the Council could show that it had consulted with the relevant elected body of local residents.

This can be arranged.

At present the Wandsworth Common MAC is putting its trust in the Staff Mutual, the officers of which are known to recognise that the Borough's Commons are special places. However, our concerns focus on the daunting word "incentivise" in Para 14 of the Paper and looking to 2019 and after. Accordingly, the MAC asks that the Events Policy can be revisited prior to the management contract being put out to tender in case the passing of time has shown that tighter safeguards are necessary.

The Events Policy that has been proposed would become the Council's Policy which would be implemented and managed by the Mutual or any subsequent provider of services. Once adopted, any future variations to the policy would need to be consulted upon and agreed by the Council's Executive, but any revisions required could be considered at the point of approving the specification for leisure and culture services, as the Events Policy would be an appendix to the specification.

This said, all policies should be treated as 'live documents' and as such, there is no reason why the Events Policy as currently proposed cannot be developed over time and in liaison with stakeholders.

Notwithstanding this, should the Mutual be approved, but later be unsuccessful in its bid to continue to manage its contract with the Council, then the staff that are employed by the Mutual (Parks, Events Team etc.) would be subject to TUPE transfer arrangements and as such, the knowledge and experience of the existing staff should not be lost.